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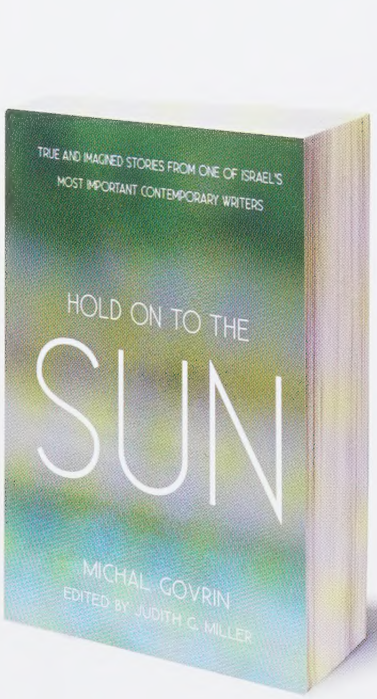
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HOLD ON TO THE
SUN
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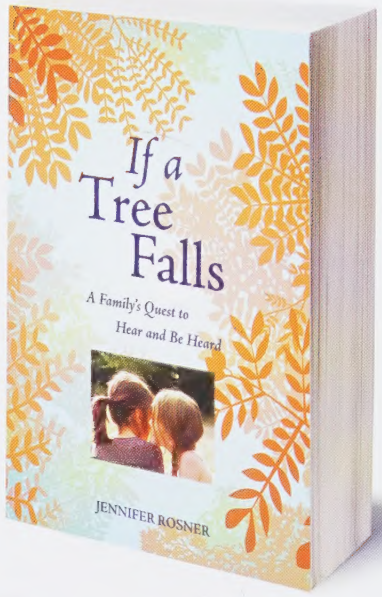
EDITED BY JUDITH C. MILLER



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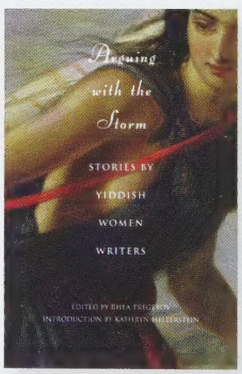

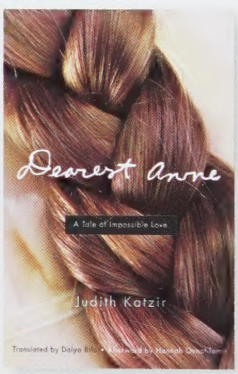

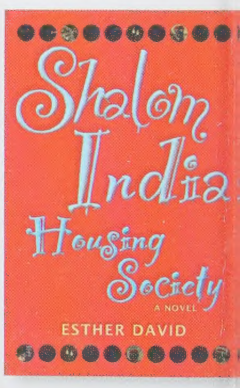

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Lilith

winter 2010–11
vol. 35, no. 4

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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Cover photo by John Loomis.

"Money is the bio-fuel that makes change possible." —Nessa Rapoport

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Lilith

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Newsstand price: $4.95 Canada: $6.95
Individual subscriptions: $25.97/4 issues
Institutions: $30/4 issues Outside U.S., add $13/year (U.S. funds only)
Single copies: $7, prepaid (includes postage)

Change of address or delivery problems: Send label to Lilith, Dept. LIL, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834, or call (800) 783-4903 or (212) 757-0818.
Retailers: To carry Lilith, call (888) 254-5484 or e-mail info@Lilith.org
LILITH (ISSN 0146-2334) is published quarterly by Lilith Publications, Inc., 250 W. 57th Street, #2432, New York, NY 10107-2420. Periodicals Postage Paid at New Your, NY and additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LILITH, P.O.B. 3000, Denville NJ 07834-3000

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Printed in Canada.

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In the touristy areas of the French Quarter, which was relatively unscathed by Katrina, New Orleans streets are full of buskers. By the dozens, these street performers enact all kinds of feats: lumber balancing, group singing, break dancing, rapping; at least this was the assortment I took in when I was there a couple of months ago. One act was particularly stunning. Two men in eye-catching metallic costumes, their bodies sprayed silver to match, stood on a makeshift platform miming to music and moving in perfect synchronicity, human simulacra of robots.

I watched them, mesmerized, for a couple of minutes. I had nothing in my wallet smaller than a $20 bill, so I reached into my pocket for a handful of change to put into their silvered bucket. One of the robo-guys shook his head at me, and without breaking the rhythm of the act said clearly: "No change. Only bills."

Women and money: How do we give it, ask for it, earn it, spend it?

Whaaaaat! I was totally taken aback. They should be grateful for anything they get, right?

And then I realized: These guys knew the quality of their work, and they were perfectly comfortable telling the crowd that they weren't going to undersell their product. Terrific! And a fascinating lesson.

For many women, our attitudes about money often reflect what we think about our work and the value we place on our time. Our money—the ways we give it and how we ask for it and how we earn it—send a message to the world. I stood on the street in New Orleans and thought a lot about money that afternoon. I watched tourists happily buying bling (sometimes known as tchotchkes) while transferring no cash to the performers whose antics make the NOLA experience so special. I thought about a friend of mine—a person pretty impecunious—who makes no impulse purchases for less than $100. Huh? Well, she says that setting this limit imposes a discipline. You have to think several times before spending $100, whereas it's easy to leak out many smaller purchases without noticing the flow.

Cash flow is not a new concern, of course. At Lilith, we've had women and money as one of our beats for many years. It's a large category, which includes what we earn, what we inherit, what we give, and the money that we manage in our homes and communities. While I was doing informal fieldwork observing street performers and their audiences, I was really in New Orleans to meet with student journalists and to report on the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America. At the G.A., one of the largest annual gatherings of Jews on the planet—more than 3,000 this time—it was clear that a serious examination of women's finances was not front and center. Not even at the concurrent Lion of Judah women's philanthropy meetings which followed the G.A.

There was energetic and illuminating talk about boys, and the need to keep males connected to Jewish life (who'd have thought…?), but hardly any public discussion about the economy's effects on women, nor about the grotesque gender gap (it's the 21st century, for heaven's sake) in wages in Jewish organizations, reported in these pages by Sarah Blustain. The shocking $20,000 disparity in annual pay between women and men doing comparable work in Jewish organizations is a *shande* that sociologist Steven M. Cohen calls "the net cost of being a woman in Jewish communal life." But the G.A., with its excellent sessions on disabilities rights, diversity, social action, Israel policies and more, managed to dim the spotlight that should have been cast on the issue of paycheck fairness—or, rather, unfairness—under our own roof.

It's not all bad news, as you'll read in this issue. Against the backdrop of chronic money worries afflicting every nonprofit (Lilith included), and the anxieties every individual feels about the present state of the economy, and the discouraging dispatches from people (Jewish and non) who monitor gender issues in the workplace, we see a glimmer of hope. Where? In the collective power of freelancers. Freelancers (your yoga instructor, the graphic designer down the block, the taxi driver you rode with last week) are our generation's equivalent of the pieceworkers with needle and thread who were exploited a hundred years ago and who managed, along with sweatshop workers, to press for protective labor laws. In 2011, as we approach the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Waist Company fire, Lilith is buoyantly spotlighting a 21st-century labor hero. Sara Horowitz values workers and their work in the same way that New Orleans street mime does, asking for real bills (including in the legislature) and not just short change.

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: RACHEL M. SCHNEIDER

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Letter from Mumbai: "Working Abroad in a Time of Great Hatred"

Monsoon season is not the time to apartment hunt. I spend days traveling around Mumbai's suburbs, getting soaked as I jump in and out of auto rickshaws, helping a friend look for that perfect one-bedroom. We find it—finally—and begin the deal-making process. But the next day the broker calls. There's a problem, he says. The housing society does not care that my friend works for a fancy multinational corporation. No Muslims allowed.

Discrimination by housing societies in India is nothing new. They often use a thinly veiled euphemism for no Muslims: "vegetarians only." But to me, a Jew and a vegetarian, the society's rejection still feels like a kick in the stomach. I imagine the broker telling me, "Sorry, no Jews allowed." I would be outraged.

About a year ago, I gave up my comfortable SoHo job and Brooklyn apartment and moved to India to work as GlobalPost's correspondent in Mumbai. I wanted to develop my skills as a reporter and learn more about this dynamic, quickly changing country.

From the beginning, Mumbai's Muslim community, which makes up about 15 percent of the city, intrigued me. I would jog along the Arabian Sea in shorts and a t-shirt and notice the women in black burqas and niqabs covering their faces. I saw them riding on the back of motorbikes and one sitting on a bench with a man's head in her lap. I realized how few Muslims I knew growing up in New York's Hudson Valley.

I spent an afternoon with one burqa-clad Muslim woman, expecting to be exposed to a totally different view of the world. But as this woman—let's call her Fatima—told me about her religion and family, I kept comparing her life to my own. We sat in her living room eating dates, while Fatima told me how Muslims must give a certain percentage of their income to charity, called *zakat*. I imagined my Sunday school classes at Temple Beth Shalom in New York and remembered bringing change each week for the *tzedaka* box.

Prophet Mohammed says don't kill a bird if you don't want to eat it, Fatima told me. Yes, I thought to myself, rabbinic law also forbids hunting for pleasure.

Speaking like a rabbi, Fatima told a story with every point she made. She compared women to a "yummy cake with a lot of ice cream," and said we must protect ourselves to keep men from pouncing on us like flies.

As she described the comfort and joy she derives from keeping herself separate from men, I thought of my visit to a Chabad House in Venice, where the rabbi's wife taught that women must keep themselves separate because men cannot control themselves.

I marvel at the similarities between the Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women I have met during my travels. Here in Mumbai, whether it is in the form of discrimination or religious teachings, I continue to see connections between my Jewish background and the Muslim community.

When I shared with my grandmother back in New York the difficulties my Muslim friend faced trying to find an apartment, she told me about her own struggles 60 years ago, when, after neighbors complained about the possibility of a Jewish family moving onto the block, the owner refused to sell to my grandparents. As I watch my friend in Mumbai get rejected from apartment after apartment, I cannot help but empathize.

And yet...there is still a part of me that holds this community at a distance. I did not tell Fatima that I am Jewish. As she talked about her ancestors, I wanted to say, "That sounds like my family, too." But I held back.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we are issuing a challenge to Jewish agencies to commit to hiring more individuals with disabilities… By establishing—and working diligently toward—a goal that 10 percent of the workforces of our Jewish agencies represent individuals with disabilities, we can live up to the highest values of our religion.

Jay Ruderman and **Nancy Kaplan Belsky** in "Meet 10% Challenge, and Transform Lives," The Jewish Advocate, September 3, 2010.

Siona Benjamin is an Indian-American Jewish artist who melds themes from both Jewish and Indian culture into her work.

I am a Jewish reporter working abroad in a time of great hatred against the state of Israel. It is not a myth that many Islamist extremists associate all Jews with a state they consider evil. While Fatima is not an extremist, I know nothing about her neighbors and friends. There may be some in her wider community who may wish me harm or could cause problems for me.

And so, no matter how much I want to be open, I feel a need to protect myself. This sometimes translates into hiding who I am.

HANNA INGBER WIN

Follow Hanna on Twitter: @Hanna_India. hannaingberwin.com.

The *Treyf* of Nuts

Last month, my two-and-a-half-year-old was diagnosed with a nut allergy. She had picked cashews out of a salad, and her eyes had gotten red and "fluffy," as she calls it. We had her tested, and were introduced into a new world.

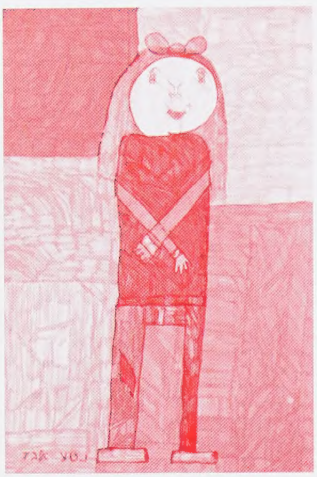
We were told to rid our house of nuts. We were told that though our daughter is not allergic to peanuts, we should rid our house of peanuts and peanut butter, peanut granola bars and peanut-butter crackers, ice cream with peanut butter, and peanut butter cups. Why? Because peanuts are processed in plants with other tree nuts, and one never knows when a renegade, devious cashew, with dreams of peanut greatness, may make its way into a peanut delicacy.

This is the point when I began to suspect that today's allergists are closely related to the rabbis who re-interpreted biblical verses to create modern kashrut. We were told that if we truly loved our daughter, and wanted to really be as safe as possible, we should avoid all foods that say "processed in a plant that also processes tree nuts." Then we were told—"read all labels, all the time, twice." Then I was truly convinced that the allergists all worked for the OU—the Orthodox kashrut authority—on their days off.

I went through my fridge. Everything we bought, from hummus to bread to cereals to snacks, said "processed in a plant with tree nuts." Many labels also said "we practice good segregation policies." I imagined the walnuts muttering under their breath about racist assembly line workers at Trader Joe's, and the pecans having a sit-in on the front of the animal-cracker bus. The inconsistent behavior which dictates my personal food choices suddenly seems terribly irresponsible. I am a "mostly" vegetarian, though I eat meat and chicken when I crave protein. We keep a strictly kosher home, but I will eat raw vegetarian food, and sometimes cooked vegetarian food, in places I trust practice good "segregation" policies. Can I be similarly inconsistent about my daughter's nut allergy? Where should we draw the lines? Do we put our complete trust in the "authorities," and rid our house entirely of nuts and all products made anywhere near nuts? Or do we create our own compromises, gingerly testing the limits?

MAYA BERNSTEIN, "Nuts," from her post at the Lilith blog.

A Dramatic Life with a Down Syndrome Daughter



NETTA BEN-HUR

Varda Ben-Hur is a big woman with a big personality—enough to fill a home, a stage, a book or two. A chubby little girl in Israel's thin austerity years; a too-round teenager; an outrageously zaftig young woman who thought marriage and motherhood would make it all right.

Varda Ben-Hur is an actress, an author, a divorced mother of two. She defines herself with the words of Reb Nachman of Bratslav: "There's nothing more whole than a heart that's broken." Her mother was a sabra, her father a Holocaust survivor from Poland. "You're a number (*hevramanit*)," he'd say, "like me—a *partizaner*, a fighter." Her fighting spirit stood her in good stead as she battled her way through her unhappy childhood and teen years, through her short marriage and the birth of two daughters, the first with Down Syndrome.

"I left my baby in the hospital for a month," Varda says sadly about her elder child. It was guilt, not love, that finally convinced her to bring little **Netta** home and raise her. And a sense of obligation: "I decided it would be very hard to bring her up, but it would be even harder to desert her." Life was a constant struggle, fighting with teachers, with the medical system, even with the army when Netta eventually tried to volunteer for a special unit.

And being the parent of a child with Down Syndrome hardly transformed Varda Ben-Hur into her fantasy, the perfect mother with the perfect life. "I acted the part," she says ruefully, "but I was ashamed of Netta and felt like I was still damaged goods myself, not normal." She moved to Jerusalem where the medical experts were concentrated, followed their advice, and says she learned to love her daughter from the baby's Moroccan grandmother.

When Netta was five, Varda decided to try to have a "normal" child, praying every day for a kid who'd be easy, simple, "like everyone else." Her miracle finally happened: she gave birth to a healthy daughter named **Or** (light). Life, however, was not yet perfect. "With all my 'feminism' and assertiveness," Varda remembers, "on the ground I did whatever my husband wanted." They divorced when Or was two, and Varda learned the hierarchy of single motherhood in Israel.

"There are different degrees of single mothers," she explains. "If you're a welfare mother, you don't get much respect. If you're a self-supporting professional mom and your kids are okay, then you're higher up the ladder; people remind you to take care of yourself. And if you take care of your own 'special' kids, that's another whole level: you become sanctified, and you're always working to preserve your sainthood."

Through it all, it was acting, spiced with her acerbic wit, that kept Varda going, a survival mechanism from childhood. An alert teacher had suggested she join an experimental youth troupe, and for the next five years she studied and performed street theater—Brecht, Shakespeare, things that were barely known in Israel at the time.

She'd also gained more weight by the time she graduated from her religious high school. Her father had fought the Nazis, and at 18 she was desperate to join the Israeli army, but even more desperate at the thought that Zahal wouldn't be able to find a uniform big enough for her. So, ignoring her family's shame and disappointment, she got an exemption from the army and went straight into the peace movement via the "Gypsies," a troupe of creative young Arab and Jewish actors who performed in kibbutzim, Arab villages, and towns and cities throughout the country.

Marriage and childbirth almost ended her budding career, but divorce sent her back to work with a vengeance. She taught drama to schoolchildren, then adults. She acted on television and on stage, and found, with amazement, that she was living better than she had before her divorce. For the first time in her life, Varda Ben-Hur began reaping respect, the singularly Israeli respect for a successful single mother. And three years ago she entered a competition for literature for retarded adults; her book *On Love*, with Netta as its heroine, was published. "Being Netta's mother is an open wound—but I also know today that she has been my teacher," Varda says. "She's amazing in her insights, and I'm proud of her."

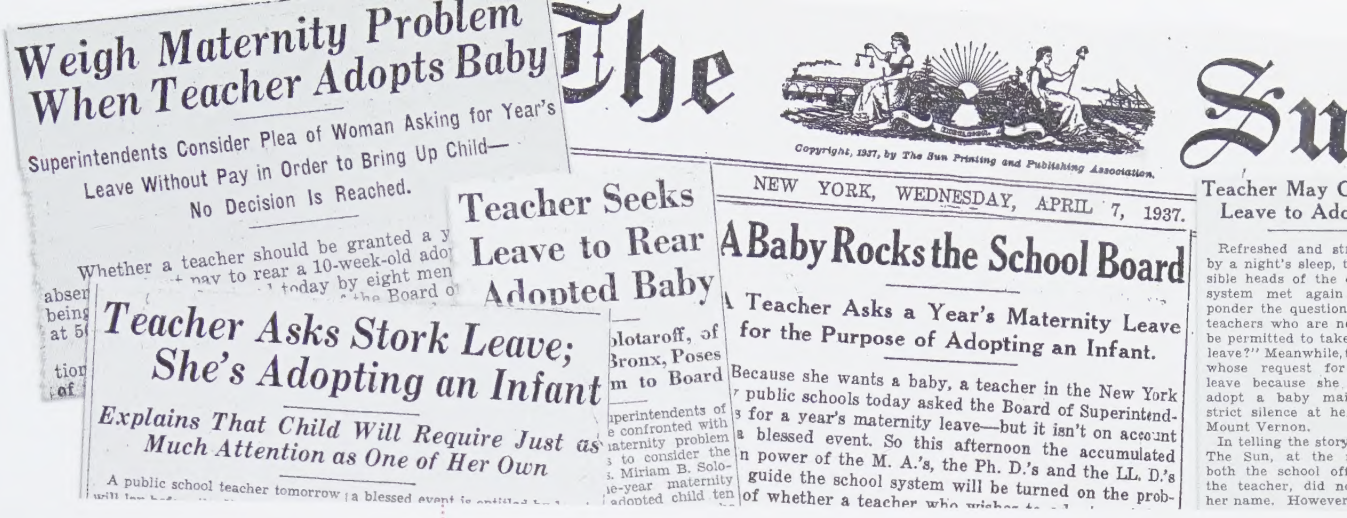
With humor and whimsy, Varda has put her heavy life on stage in "Are You Happy Yet?" a short Hebrew play. Three young men back her up musically and dramatically, romancing her and the audience with flamenco, blues, klezmer, and almost everything in between. Varda takes the thin world to task and laughs at herself, a fat 54-year-old, who's finally where she wants to be, or almost. "When you're young and fat, it's a nightmare to walk down the street. At my age, no one expects you to look any other way."

Is she happy yet? "I'm not whole, not perfect," she declares, returning to Reb Nachman, "but I'm ready to start living. To sit comfortably in my chair, and if the chair isn't comfortable, to ask for a different one."

BARBARA GINGOLD

For more information about her book, *Sipoor al Ahava v'Otoboosim*, or her show, *At Kvar Meoosheret*, contact: hashemshely@gmail.com

Varda Ben-Hur and musicians



Weigh Maternity Problem When Teacher Adopts Baby

Superintendents Consider Plea of Woman Asking for Year's Leave Without Pay in Order to Bring Up Child— No Decision Is Reached.

Whether a teacher should be granted a y... nay to rear a 10-week-old ado... today by eight men ... the Board o...

Teacher Seeks Leave to Rear Adopted Baby

...lotaroff, of Bronx, Poses ...m to Board

...perintendents of ...e confronted with ...aternity problem ...s to consider the ...s. Miriam B. Solo... ...e-year maternity ...adopted child ten

Teacher Asks Stork Leave; She's Adopting an Infant

Explains That Child Will Require Just as Much Attention as One of Her Own

A public school teacher tomorrow [a blessed event is entitled by law to two years leave, less than half of which she devotes to awaiting developments." (What the paper doesn't note is that this leave was unpaid!)

The Sun

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NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 1937.

A Baby Rocks the School Board

A Teacher Asks a Year's Maternity Leave for the Purpose of Adopting an Infant.

Because she wants a baby, a teacher in the New York ... public schools today asked the Board of Superintend... ...s for a year's maternity leave—but it isn't on account ...a blessed event. So this afternoon the accumulated ...n power of the M. A.'s, the Ph. D.'s and the LL. D.'s ...guide the school system will be turned on the prob... ...of whether a teacher who wishes to ...

Teacher May C... Leave to Ado...

Refreshed and st... by a night's sleep, t... sible heads of the ... system met again ... ponder the question ... teachers who are n... be permitted to take ... leave?'' Meanwhile, ... whose request for ... leave because she ... adopt a baby mai... strict silence at he... Mount Vernon.

In telling the story ... The Sun, at the ... both the school off... the teacher, did n... her name. However

Maternity leave becomes even more complicated with alternative family structures, and as men take a more active role in parenting. For example, any additional time offered beyond what is medically necessary for the mother to recover from childbirth can be considered "bonding leave" and may be expected by adoptive parents and male employees whose wives have given birth. As these complexities arise, you may want to hire a lawyer.

Pamela Ryckman, from "Taking a Positive Approach to an Employee's Maternity Leave," New York Times, July 22, 2010.

"This afternoon, the accumulated brain power of the M.A.'s, the PH.D.'s and the LL.D.'s who guide the school system will be turned on the problem of whether a teacher who wishes to adopt an infant comes within the maternity leave by-law."

Nearly 75 years later, **Miriam Solotaroff**'s story feels as fresh as ever. With benefits, flex time, and family leave still up for discussion, it's disconcertingly familiar to look back at this 1937 news report to see what was on the table then, when this Jewish school teacher adopted a baby through a UJA-Federation-affiliated agency. "Ordinarily," one newspaper euphemistically reported at the time, "a teacher anticipating a blessed event is entitled by law to two years leave, less than half of which she devotes to awaiting developments." (What the paper doesn't note is that this leave was unpaid!)

When Solotaroff eventually won her suit, the Board of Superintendents of the City of New York "prepared for a 'harvest of baby adoption' by childless married school teachers." Board members were also very worried about what would happen "if an unmarried teacher should ask for similar privileges," resolving that "the wholesome atmosphere of a home would have to be present before an unmarried teacher was allowed to take a 'maternity' leave to care for an adopted child." Solotaroff's baby, **Esther-Ann Asch**, grew up to be an active member of UJA-Federation, including chairing its Task Force on Jewish Women and the New Leadership Division in Westchester.

Though the discourse surrounding adoption, motherhood, family leave, and flex time has seemingly evolved, the question of motherhood in all its diverse forms is still very much in play in the high-stakes realm of the workplace.

Is Open Adoption Still an Open Question?

When open adoption advocate **Betty Jean Lifton** died in November, this issue surfaced once again. In the New York Times obituary, **Margalit Fox** wrote that when Lifton's *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* was published in 1998, "Adoption in general was a veiled topic, and adoptees—assuming they were told anything—rarely knew their given names, their birth parents' identities or the precise circumstances of their adoptions." Though laws and practices have loosened in some jurisdictions, for many adoptees these earlier strictures have shaped their lives. Lifton, born to a 17-year-old Jewish woman and adopted into a Jewish family at 2 1/2, wrote, "The old saying that the law is always years behind social change is true concerning adoption, because over the past few decades, I have seen society opening from within. The trend toward open adoption arrangements continues."

Art & Sex in Israel

"A magazine about sex has to be sexy, don't you think?" **Merav Maroody** asks in response to a compliment about the design of Ms.Use, a new—and gorgeous—Israeli periodical focusing on both art and sexuality. But Maroody, editor in chief, has a much wider vision: "We're trying to build a community, to find out if a magazine has the power to do that," she explains.

Ms.Use launched in 2009, and has put out two glossy issues, each focusing on a different aspect of sexuality; its first issue sold over 1,000 copies—no small feat for a niche publication in Tel Aviv. Why sexuality? "For something that is the one universal topic—the one thing that's on everyone's mind constantly—sex is something that people have a really hard time talking about. Even with your close friends, it can be hard, especially, to ask questions about things you think might not be normal." Ms.Use is a forum, giving people a language (both textual and visual) and a common ground to have those sometimes difficult conversations. Maroody, 34, says she's often asked why a magazine couldn't just deal with the issue of sex once and move on to other topics. "That's what people don't understand," she explains. "We think sex is a lens for viewing the world—not a topic. Sex ed in Israel runs, generally, from non-existent to awful," and Ms.Use is an underground way to redress some of that.

And why art? Maroody, who graduated from art school in Israel in 2001, sees sex and art as inextricably linked. "The time around when I graduated, it was a crappy time for art in Israel. The political situation sort of stifled people's expression and their ability to express interest in art, and at the same time artists weren't making enough effort to get art out to people who would have been interested in it, but would never ever set foot in a gallery." Maroody found such conditions oddly inspirational: after beginning her career in cinematography, something she still does in between issues, she started a series of independent projects intended to bridge the divide between Israeli art and regular Israelis. The project that ultimately stuck is Ms.Use, which Maroody hopes will not only plug Israelis into their own artistic scene, but will also serve as a bridge for ideas about sexuality, bringing them from the academy to the general populace. One column is written by a former prostitute, another by a disgruntled tech writer. Article ideas sometimes come from readers themselves, with whom Maroody engages in long debates via Ms.Use's Facebook page.

"Israel has a lot of really conservative ideas about gender and gender roles, and to build our way out of that is going to take a while—and I believe it has to be done visually. Because it's visually that we first observe and categorize a person—we tag them 'male' or 'female' or whatever. If we can teach people to see everything in a more complicated way, then we can help pause that moment of initial tagging, and complicate it."

Ms.Use is currently available only in Hebrew, though plans are in the works to finance an English translation. Non-Hebrew readers will still marvel at the vivid art, and Hebrew readers will find that the gaping hole of Israel's 'zine culture has gotten smaller, thanks to this young magazine with lots of attitude and an eye for the unexpected. www.msuse.com.

MELANIE WEISS

Women are 25 times more likely to be seriously injured by a spouse soon after they are separated than when they are still together. Leaving means the batterer is losing control, and that can send him over the edge... In the Iranian Jewish community, divorce is still frowned upon, and airing dirty laundry is believed to shame the family and harm the children's future marriage prospects—notions that for many years also hampered the Orthodox community's willingness to deal with domestic violence. While those myths are slowly being chipped away in Orthodox circles, they linger on in the Iranian and other immigrant communities.

from "The Ugly secret: An Increase in Domestic Abuse Spotlights the Role of Verbal Violence," by **Julie Gruenbaum Fax** in the Jewish Journal (L.A.), November 17, 2010.

I approached the principal of a modern religious school that offered Talmud to its girls. I wanted to know whether she offered Talmud as a prelude to a life of learning, a goal every boys' school would have taken for granted. She threw off my question: Lifelong learning would be impossible, she informed me, while raising a family.

Viva Hammer, "Educating Bruria," in the Jerusalem Post, November 12, 2010.

"Dear America,
When you tell gay Americans that they can't serve their country openly, or marry the person that they love, you're telling that to kids, too. So don't be fucking shocked, and wonder where all these bullies are coming from that are torturing young kids, and driving them to kill themselves because they're different. They learned it from watching you."

Sarah Silverman on YouTube

Happily Queer in Middle School

Most people recollect that flutter for a special someone as early as elementary school. Yet when it comes to addressing the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, many people feel these children are too young to know what they want. People say, "How can you be sure?" or, "You have so much time ahead of you for that stuff." The difference, of course, is that for heterosexual youth the surrounding society inherently reinforces their crushes. Beyond sexual identity, there is the issue of gender. We are socialized into our genders from birth—think pink onesies or blue, cars or dolls. It doesn't take long for children to sense what doesn't fit social expectations.

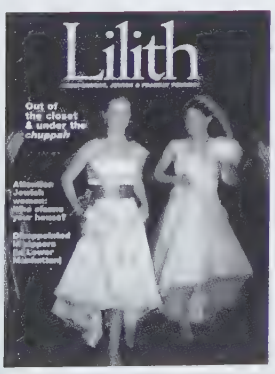
In early 2010, a mother whose son came out as gay at age 12 turned to the JCC in Manhattan when she tried unsuccessfully to find a support group for her son. Most programs start at age 14, but 11-13 year olds are also processing their gender and sexual identities, and so Cometfire was born—a free discussion group that meets twice monthly for LGBTQ middle schoolers (11-to-14 year olds). Cometfire is an informal gathering, usually involving an imaginative project—frosting **Lady Gaga** cookies, drawing "queer superheroes"—and talking about their lives and queer culture. "What should I do about a kid that teases me at school for being gay?" asked one 12-year-old boy. "I bet I can walk better in stilettos then you can!" announced another. An 11-year-old girl asked, "What is 'queer family'?" And a 13-year-old girl decided she likes the group "because I get to express my feeling about what it feels like to be gay," and added, "I am glad that every woman does not *have* to get pregnant."

While not completely developed emotionally or physically, these youth *do* know enough about themselves to know they're different. The young people, and their parents, marvel at how they've never had anyone to talk to about this "stuff" before. The gay teen suicide tragedies of the past few months highlight the urgency and value of Cometfire.

The significance of Cometfire is not just in the meetings. The existence of such a group is also a reminder to caregivers and educators that we have an obligation to support young LGBTQ people in understanding and embracing their differences.

ALISSA WISE AND SCOTT QUASHA

Cometfire, a program of the LBGTQ department at the JCC in Manhattan and is co-led by Wise, a rabbi and Program Director at Ma'yan (www.mayan.org), and Quasha, a school psychologist and professor at Brooklyn College. alissa@mayan.org; scottquasha@mac.com.



"Tamar and her partner Arielle [shown on Lilith's Summer 2006 cover] recently celebrated their fifth anniversary following a commitment ceremony and are a happy couple pursuing their respective careers. How can my wife and I, as members of an Orthodox Jewish community, countenance all this? The answers lie in our love for our daughter and her partner, our sense of basic human decency and fairness, and our feeling that Judaism is a religion to enrich rather than impoverish our lives."

Kenneth Prager, in an op-ed in The Jewish Standard (N.J.), October 28, 2010, responding to that paper's refusal to publish marriage announcements featuring same-sex couples.

unforgettable

Are women's friendships perilously toxic, as several popular books declaim? Or instead, as recent research offers, are they the necessary—and sometime sufficient—armature to our happiness and successful functioning? Here are four high-octane friendship stories, wildly different: one elegiac, one bitter, one grateful, one celebratory.

Balm in Gilead

MARCIA FALK ON BETH UVAL

I feared it would be awkward to talk by telephone, she so many thousands of miles away, barely able to respond. But the words pour out of me—a groundswell, a flood. I talk and talk, trying to tell her what her life has meant to mine these 47 years, from the summer we met, two New York girls, not quite 17, in (of all places) northern Wisconsin, until this September when, 10 days apart, we turned 64. When I pause for a breath, she says, in a low voice but distinctly, *todah*—thank you. Twice more I pause; twice more she says *todah*.

I don't want to tire her, but I can't stop holding on. Finally her daughter comes back on the line. She tells me that Beth hasn't spoken more than a few words in the last two days, and they aren't sure what she comprehends. But I believe Beth has heard me, just as I have heard her. This isn't the first time I've felt her presence from afar; ours has been a friendship that has survived more than one kind of distance.

We met in 1963, in a Hebrew-speaking summer camp where our daily schedule included an eclectic array of classes: we read the Babylonian creation myth alongside Genesis, studied Maslow's post-Freudian theory of "self-actualization," learned modern Hebrew poetry from an Israeli woman with an enchantingly musical voice, and were instructed by Shaul, an Israeli ex-scout, how not to chop wood: *Af pa'am lo al haritzpah*—never on the ground! (Hardly a life-changing experience, but in its anomalous quirkiness, it lodged itself in my memory.) My seventeenth summer was a magical time, filled with new discoveries and temptations (my first real kiss, my first taste of marijuana) and peopled with unforgettable characters. But Beth—soft-voiced, gentle-mannered, with a smile that revealed a radiant inner joy—was the jewel in the crown. Every day, between classes, we'd sit on the sun-warmed grass and do what teenage girls do best: talk, and talk some more.

We had much in common, not just in background but in interests, among them, a love of literature that would stay with each of us our whole lives. But our personalities were strikingly different—opposites attracting. Although neither of us was lacking in adolescent joie de vivre, Beth's was a quiet enthusiasm, coupled with an easy and natural optimism. If I had to choose a single word to describe her, then and now, it would be "grace"—in Hebrew, *hen*. My own demeanor (as I'd been told more than once) was "intense," my moods changeable. I threw myself into life and had joy in many things, but I was also susceptible to bouts of fretfulness. If I was sorrowing or brooding, Beth's words filled me with comfort and light.

At summer's end, Beth invited me to visit with her family in Gilead, their 200-acre tree farm in the Catskill mountains. I had heard much about Gilead from Beth, but there was no way

friendships

LYNNE FELDMAN, WWW.LYNNEFELDMAN.COM

I could have imagined its beauty. When I stepped out of the car and inhaled the crisp blue air, its stillness lightly punctuated by the calls of late summer's birds, and took in the harmony of meadow, woods, and pond, vistas all around, it was love at first sight and scent and sound. Did I sense, at that moment, that Gilead would become my life-long sanctuary and that its devoted stewards—Beth's parents, Lillian and Paul—would become family to me? How could I have known that my vision of marrying under a *huppah* on Gilead's lawn would be fulfilled a quarter-century later?

Glorious Gilead was where our friendship unfolded and blossomed, and where it continued to be nurtured over the years to come. In our walks together along the stone walls bordering the woods, we were cocooned in intimacy, sharing the stories and confidences that best friends share.

For five years following that first summer, throughout our senior year of high school in different cities and four years of college in separate states, Beth and I remained close, maintaining our connection through Gilead excursions and correspondence. But after college our lives branched in opposite directions, and

not just geographically. Beth stayed in New York for a while, then headed east to Jerusalem—while I went west, to California. It was the late sixties, a time of enormous changes in the American social and political landscape, and California was at the epicenter. The new wave of feminism engaged both my intellect and my passion, and I soon became disenchanted with the patriarchal order and many of its engraved traditions, such as the "nuclear family." With the ardency of a new convert, I tried to impress upon my best friend the benefits of raised consciousness. But the women's movement had yet to reach Israel and wouldn't get there for another decade; Beth must have been, at the least, bewildered by my letters. So far away from each other, in such different environs, with no opportunity for face-to-face conversation, we fell prey to mutual misunderstanding. One example: Although we were each of us single and living with female housemates, we looked upon our situations rather differently. When, in one of her letters, Beth made the comment—innocent enough, from her perspective—that she was tired of living alone, she meant that she wanted a male life-partner. But I was dismayed by what I took to be the implication that women friends didn't count, and I retorted that living with other women was not living "alone." I didn't receive a reply to that letter. Had I, in my advocacy of the ideal of Sisterhood, ruptured the bond with the closest real sister I had?

Beth was raising children (she was the mother of four) and I wasn't sure where—or even whether—there was room for me in her world.

Within three years, Beth was married, but by then our correspondence had tapered off, and I found out about the wedding after the fact, from her parents. I was saddened to have missed such an important event in my friend's life, and I regretted my part in creating the distance that had arisen between us. But I had no idea what to do about it. Beth and I had lost much of our *safah m'shutefet*—our common language—and I didn't know where to find it again. So I did the only thing I knew to do: I tucked the friendship into a corner of my heart, and held it there, for safekeeping.

A decade and more passed, during which Beth and I saw each other only sporadically, even during the two year-long periods when I was living in Jerusalem, not far from her doorstep. Beth's husband and I had not yet—how shall I put it?—learned to love each other across our differences, and this created a dilemma for Beth. (Ezri wasn't exactly a fan of my feminist beliefs, nor, probably, of the ardor with which I advocated them. Happily, though, he and I bridged the distance between us at a later stage, when I turned to him to be a Hebraic consultant for a book I was writing. How ironic—or was it poetic justice?—that *The Book of Blessings* was a feminist re-creation of prayer!) And, too, Beth was raising children (ultimately, she was the mother of four) and I wasn't sure where—or even whether—there was room for me in her world. Had she forgotten me? I kept hoping we might find a way to be more present in each other's lives, but our orbits didn't intersect, and it was not to be.

And yet, Beth remained, for me, still, the friend dearest to my heart. I knew I could never lose her. And I didn't.

How to explain this? Is it enough to say that, like most young loves, friendships that burst forth intensely in adolescence have a way of embedding themselves in the neural pathways? Or is it that Beth and I were born soul-mates, our friendship as *bashert* as any marriage made in heaven; that we were, simply, meant to be in each other's lives?

Part of the explanation is surely the magic of Gilead, a place that welcomed and embraced me continuously over the course of almost five decades. Gilead was not just the site of my wedding; it provided the *m'saderet k'dushin*—the officiator—in the person of Beth's mother. I gave my son the middle name "Gilead" and brought him to his namesake often as he was growing up, so that he too became part of the intergenerational circle.

Beth had given me Gilead, and Gilead gave me back Beth, over and over again: each hike on its trails, each swim in its pond, each session of blueberry-picking brought me close to her, whether she was present in person or not. If, for periods of time, the friendship seemed suspended, Gilead reminded me that the connection was still there. And, in truth, Beth and I always found our way back to each other with remarkable ease. There was never a conversation that didn't seem to pick up right where we had left off.

The geographical distance is hardest now, at this time of perhaps our greatest closeness. This far away from her, I can't know, at any given moment, if Beth is still among the living. I find myself wondering what I'll feel when the news finally arrives. Will the moment stun? Will it be numbing? Or will it come as a relief, putting an end to the waiting, allowing the full grieving to begin? I've already faced the hard facts: we won't be taking any more walks together, or writing impassioned letters, or even talking long-distance on the phone. The last conversation I had with Beth will, it seems, be the last conversation we'll ever have. And it will have to be enough. Now, in this window of not-knowing, is my time to practice not needing more.

One of Beth's sons has told me that, even after she was admitted to the hospital, too weak to stand, Beth never lost faith that she would get up and stand again on her own two legs. This doesn't surprise me. Just three months ago, unable to contain my yearning for things to be different from the way they were, I blurted out to Beth, "I want you *one-hundred-per-cent well*"—to which she replied calmly, confidently, "I *will* be. I know it's not rational, but I believe it." One could call this denial, one might opine that she deprived herself of the chance to say good-bye.

But Beth doesn't need "good-bye"—and I no longer need to say it either. Her last words to me speak for both of us: *todah*, three times *todah*.

—Berkeley, California, 27 September 2010
Hol Hamo'ed Sukkot, 5771

Postscript:
The moment has come. It is neither numbing nor a relief, but more stunning than I could have imagined. An ocean of grief, and no more words.

—5 October 2010 / *28 Tishrei 5771.* ■

Marcia Falk is the author of The Book of Blessings; The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible; *and other books of poetry and translations. She is working on a book for the High Holiday season and has returned to painting, her first love. www.marciafalk.com.*

Click: IGNORE

BY ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

Opening up my e-mail one night a few months ago, I saw it: a message from my closest friend from late childhood. She'd found me—no surprise—on Facebook. "Hi Alice! You remember me—I hope!" As if I wouldn't.

We'd met at Jewish summer camp when we were both nine. Until age 15, we'd been best friends. She lived two suburbs over from me on Long Island, close enough to yak every week on the telephone and visit often. When my mother bought me a red plush winter jacket with fake white fur trim around the hood, she got one too. When I acquired a pen pal from England—a guy—so did she. We did sleepovers, which she always insisted take place at her house, and I always acquiesced. There she'd show me her parents' wedding album, we'd sing to all her records, eat Carvel, watch "Car 54." Then we'd be up all night, whispering and giggling at whatever struck our little-girl selves as funny: the voice of a bunk mate, which I compared to a fog horn; the pecan pie that her family's African-American housekeeper had served for dinner—disgusting, my friend declared; the toothy, lopsided smile of the camp handyman's wife; the strange behavior of her adult cousin with severe disabilities. Some of the private jokes in our arsenal—cruel, even racist—we carefully hoarded, to be whipped out whenever we felt like cracking up. She was my laugh buddy.

"I'd like to read your book, Alice. What's it called?"

"I love you!" she often reminded me. And, yes, I loved her too. Every summer, she and I returned to camp, and that's where I would begin to question this professed love. Sports ruled at camp, and the athletic gene had completely passed my family by. I'm built just like my grandmother, short legs and a big *tuchus*. My friend, shapely, muscular, was the one everybody wanted on their color war team. At camp, she could be friends with anybody she chose; even the older girls coveted her. One of them, a girl who reminded anybody who would listen that she was a cheerleader back home, once threw me a gratuitous insult in front of my friend. Something about my having a "big ass." The meanness stung me, but worse was the hurtful fact that my friend said nothing in my defense. Truth was, when we were at camp, my friend turned into Mean Girl. She'd sit next to another girl on a bus trip after promising to buddy with me. She'd inform me she "hated" how I wore my hair—it was, like many a Jewish girl's, dark and thick, pulled back into a ponytail. She'd help herself to my comic books, then pass them on to somebody else.

"We've spent many a great summer and winter together and I hope that wherever we may be, we will always be the best-of-friends," she wrote in my autograph book at the end of one long-ago summer. "Love and luck to one of the greatest (underlined 10 times) girls I know. May we never part, ever."

The following year, I told her I wasn't returning to camp. She was indignant. For months she tried to change my mind. Finally she gave up. "All right, Alice, suit yourself. Stay in the hot city," she said. (For the record: I lived in the verdant suburb of Great Neck). "She's my best friend, but she hurts me more than anybody in the world," I wrote in my diary. "I was at her house today, and we were playing basketball with the kids across the street. I fell and scraped my leg. And she called me a klutz! She's so bratty. I'm never speaking to her again! See if I mean it!" Reading this now, calls forth the scene in her driveway perfectly: she, her hands on her hips, looking at me with palpable disgust as I lay sprawled on the concrete, before turning her back on me.

Our relationship limped along for a few more years. She continued to call, but now when my mother called me to the phone, I refused to take it. Finally, the calls stopped, and I stopped thinking about her. She phoned me one last time, at the end of our senior year in high school, a terrible time for me. I was suffering from severe depression, and I told my friend I was seeing a psychiatrist.

Did she want us to meet? I don't remember. In any case we had no more contact. Until she found me on the Facebook site for our summer camp alums.

I ignored her message.

A few weeks later, she messaged again, after another alumna had congratulated me on the publication of one of my books. "I'd like to read your book, Alice. What's it called?" This time, I toyed with the idea of answering her. I'd recently attended my high school reunion, and returned feeling unexpectedly gratified. People I had remembered as the antithesis of kind were now, to my astonishment, effusive and warm. People do grow up. People change. And perhaps this too would be true of my friend. Maybe we could now laugh at the memories of ourselves, and she would acknowledge—and apologize for—being such a mean girl.

I asked myself, do I really want to get into the sandbox with her again? I haven't heard from my childhood friend again. Has she any idea why I didn't respond? Did my ignoring her hurt her? I'm ashamed to say this, but I hope so.

I called a grown-up good friend to talk over my uneasiness. Despite my long-ago realization that my childhood friend was also my tormenter, I was, I told Roberta, still tempted to reconnect with her. "But I'm not sure why," I added.

"Sometimes," Roberta offered wisely, "you just have to close the door." ■

Alice Sparberg Alexiou is a contributing editor at Lilith and the author of The Flatiron: the New York Landmark and the Incomparable City That Arose With It *(2010).*

"Folks, this is what a feminist looks like."

FLORENCE HOWE ON GRACE PALEY

I met Grace on marches and in political meetings in Cambridge in the 1960s. But our friendship grew specifically in relation to the Feminist Press. Her generosity was as boundless as her energy, and she spoke at fundraisers, signed fundraising letters, wrote blurbs for our books. She also supported me personally. When she knew I was alone out in the Amagansett cottage and depressed, she called every day to ask what I was doing. Once, I replied that I was trying to get several mean blue jays to stop badgering a balding jay.

"Are you saying that you can tell one blue jay from another?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, they're all different," I responded.

"Well," she said, "that calls for an assignment. You must write a poem about blue jays. I'll call tomorrow, and you can read it to me."

Addressing an audience, Grace strode energetically onto a platform, a middle-aged woman wearing a loose jacket over a midlength skirt or a pair of trousers. Her gray hair was unfashionably piled on her head. But her smile shone so that you could see it even from a back row. She'd begin by saying, "Folks, this is what a feminist looks like," and the crowd would laugh and relax.

At the end of the 1980s, she came to see me, saying I could do something for her. She had a small collection of prose and poetry, along with paintings by Vera B. Williams, some of which were first published by the War Resisters League as a datebook called *365 Reasons Not to Have Another War.* Vera's paintings, Grace carefully explained, were not illustrations. They were antiwar art, just as the stories and poems were antiwar art. And they needed to be included in the volume, which she and Vera had worked on together. The problem was that most of the paintings were in color, and no publisher would take the volume on. It was a slim collection: *Long Walks and Intimate Talks* came to only 78 pages when the Feminist Press published it in 1991 in paperback, with a few hundred hardcover boxed volumes signed by Grace and Vera.

Until her very last days, Grace's mind was clear. The cancer that had taken one breast had metastasized to her bones. On July 21, 2007, a month and a day before Grace's death, I drove to Vermont to stay in Grace and Bob's extra cottage. When I awoke the next morning, I found Grace just emerging in a bathrobe from her bedroom. She said she'd like to go for a walk, asking me to go with her. I assumed she meant around the property, perhaps into the woods behind the house, but when we stepped outside, she headed swiftly to her car. I was sure she was in no shape to drive and tried to get her to go in my car.

"No," she said, "You don't know the way."

"Do you have your license with you?" I asked.

"No," she said, "I don't need it."

For a second I assumed she would be stopped by the absence of keys, but she reached for them on the floor of the front seat. Impatient now, for I was still trying to delay her, Grace commanded, "Get in the car."

I really began to worry when she took the curves on the hill much more swiftly than I would. When we emerged into traffic, my worry turned to fear, as she brazenly crossed lanes directly into the face of traffic. Once we were on small rural roads between great fields of grain, with no cars to dodge, I relaxed, simply watching Grace, who was clearly enjoying every moment. Just as I wondered whether we were lost, Grace uttered an "aha," and we emerged onto a road filled with traffic that seemed to dissolve before her beat-up car. She parked in front of a huge farm stand and got out of the car, smiling and saying hello to people whom she greeted by name.

I was sure she was in no shape to drive. Impatient, Grace commanded, "Get in the car."

She chose some vegetables, and then we walked into a coffee bar behind the farm stand, where we sat until she felt ill again and I suggested leaving. She drove back much more slowly and directly.

Several hours later, Bob told me that Grace was not allowed to drive, that her license had been taken away, that the police knew her, and that local drivers tried to stay out of her way. I didn't suggest the obvious: keep the car keys in his pocket and not on the floor of the car.

Fifteen minutes later, Grace walked into the house, looking chipper and very pleased with herself, carrying a stack of mail and magazines. "Someone had to go to the post office," she said as she went off to bed. ■

Florence Howe is the founding editor of the Feminist Press, which in 2011 will publish her memoir, A Life in Motion, *from which this is adapted.*

For more about Grace Paley, see Lilly Rivlin's just-released documentary film, "Grace Paley: Collected Shorts." lillyrivlin.com

AT LILITH.ORG: *Read a piece by Susan Schnur about friendships in the Lilith office at http://lilith.org/landmark_articles*

An Ode to 40 Years: The Power of Women's Friendship

BY RABBI NAAMAH KELMAN AND NESSA RAPOPORT

NAAMAH KELMAN: From the minute we sat down to talk on the lawn in front of the library at Camp Ramah in Palmer, we knew. Even as we exchanged details of daily teenage life, we understood the magnitude of our meeting. In peasant blouses and jeans, both descendants of rabbinic families, we felt the insistent claim of our yichus (illustrious ancestry) and, as girls, its invisibility.

Our families had known each other for three generations; our futures would reach far beyond the conventions of what Jewish women in 1970 were supposed to be. Across continents, through time, by reams of letters, tapes, faxes, e-mail, and—always—the phone, often daily between Jerusalem and New York, we have taught each other to look at the world not from the narrow limits of self-doubt or despair, but through a great telescope toward the infinite.

The Talmud teaches us that when two people study Torah, the *shekhinah* (the feminine presence of God) dwells with them. The Torah and Talmud also tell us of the holiness of great friendships, but they are overwhelmingly between men. The notable exception is the love of Ruth for Naomi. In this remarkable relationship, Ruth embraces all that Naomi is: "Wherever you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God my God." This declaration, usually seen as an acceptance of the Jewish faith and peoplehood, also represents the ultimate act of love for another person. Ruth's famous statement is her claim to a new people and faith, but it is also an oath of friendship.

Is the goal of friendship to give ourselves over completely to another? Rather, isn't it to recognize the otherness of a friend and embrace it? Ruth is offered to us as the ideal; she seemingly negates herself for Naomi. Yet, this biblical account of true and steadfast friendship is about the rebirth of both women. Naomi's loss creates, through Ruth's devotion, the opportunity for a new beginning. By the close of the book, both Ruth and Naomi have changed and triumphed together.

A lifelong friendship encompasses the power to comfort and, enduringly, the capacity to impel a friend to realize all her gifts, to celebrate her in her success and even in her love for another: lover, spouse, child, parent, or friend.

Martin Buber has taught us that all real living is encounter. The Divine enters the encounter when two human beings meet. Spiritual intimacy has a tremendous liberating power: When two friends discover works of art together or share a breathtaking vista, surely the Divine is with them.

Above all, there is the compassionate insight that one friend can offer another. I am blessed with a friend who knows the right words to guide and yet to ease. When she responds, it is not only out of understanding but out of a wonderful confidence in me. At moments of anguish and of exultation, she meets me with the same steadfast love, never wavering in the great vision she has always had for me.

NESSA RAPOPORT: *You, carrying your pail ahead of me, spilling mercy and forgiveness daily, calling my name at the same moment I am conjuring you, a voice of unpolluted clarity, half a world away, beside, within me. You, my theological relief, my proof that even in the midst of unslaked cruelty in a barbaric century, nothing less than a divinity could have tendered what you give me, and allowed that in my being on earth I give to you.*

NK: In my worst times, and hers, in the losses of love and work, in devastating grief, we have found the strength to console one another, even within our own desolation. Ruth, in the midst of her tragedy, beheld a vision of Naomi's life that Naomi herself could not see. The essence of redemptive friendship is to see well beyond the pain and fears of a friend, to foretell a glorious future for her, and to cajole and guide her there.

NR: *The symmetry of leaving earth with friends is not allotted in this ragged life. We debate: When you and I grow old, which one ought to go first, to spare the other pain. But that choice is not offered us. What we can choose, and do, is perishable, imperfect love, intimate with loss and bound to it. To let go. Give us a natural parting in old age, completed lives, our children raised, indifferent to each other, like children forced to play together, our husbands tolerant, you mocking my distress at wrinkled flesh, me tender of your eccentricities. Neither to save nor be saved, not remarkable, Lord, transmute a passionate youth, grant two mortal friends an ordinary life.*

NK: What has held us together, kept us sane, has been not sorrow but laughter. When the biblical Sarah, well into her nineties, howled at God's promise of a son, I believe that she laughed not at the absurdity of the idea but out of hope—the laughter of our reaching beyond our most improbable and seemingly foolish dreams.

Once, when we were young, we laughed for an entire day, falling asleep to a joke we invented, waking up to find it just as funny, and laughing even when we traveled together on a plane to another city. That day became the metaphor of our friendship.

We could say that we were unseasoned, naïve. But now, 40 years later, we still laugh. When all the sound, professional advice falls short, we somehow find a way to laugh ourselves back to restoration. With her, I join those who came before and will come after me in the great Jewish sweep of faith and redemption, and I am comforted.

Is this communion not what the Holy One set us on earth to do? It is impossible to undertake the task alone. But when two friends can see the highest in each other, when they can be frail and then fortified, God dwells with them. ■

Rabbi Naamah Kelman, dean of HUC-JIR/Jerusalem, is the first woman to be ordained in Israel and a longstanding activist in Jewish education, feminism, and interfaith work.

Nessa Rapoport is the author of Preparing for Sabbath, *a novel;* A Woman's Book of Grieving, *a collection of her prose poems; and* House on the River, *a memoir of family and place. Her words here are adapted from* A Woman's Book of Grieving *by Nessa Rapoport* ©1994. *All rights reserved.*

"Besser Fargessen"

Emotional firewalls can lead to generations of silence. A tin box and a 94-year-old woman reveal one Jewish family's secret.

by ELLEN AZORIN

In 1952, my parents moved my grandparents from their Brooklyn apartment into the Hebrew Home for the Aged, disposing of most of their possessions and consolidating what little was left—photos, documents, some odds and ends from dresser drawers, anything that looked important—into a large tin box. I have a vivid memory of this box—broad and flat, unpainted, with a big metal latch—because it rested for decades on a shelf in a storage closet in my parents' home.

At some point in the late 1960s, the box was taken out. A friend of my parents was going to visit the Soviet Union, and my father sifted through the old photos and letters in the hope that they could help her locate relatives of ours who might still be alive. My grandfather had lost touch with his brothers and their children during World War II—all of them, like my father and grandfather, classical musicians. My father knew that one had been a professor of music in St. Petersburg, another a cellist with the Bolshoi Ballet. Indeed, my parents' friend returned to New York with gifts and vodka from long-lost relations, and my father was thrilled.

Among the documents that came out of the big tin box that day was a newspaper article, fragile and yellow with age, which someone had folded into a small square as though to hide it somewhere. I opened it gingerly, afraid that it would crumble in my hands. It was an article from the *Forvertz*, one of New York's Yiddish daily newspapers, dated 1909. At the top was a photo of a handsome young woman with a high ruffled collar under an embroidered velvet jacket, a montage of smaller photos of young children below her—presumably studio photographs she'd brought with her from Russia.

My father, recognizing the woman as his mother, realized that the children must have been those who had died before he and his only known sibling, Sam, were born. In childhood, my father said, he had heard whispered references to these other children, but any questioning on his part was always met with a stern "*besser fargessen*" (better to forget), and by the time he was an adult, he had long since ceased to wonder. I, on the other hand, was captivated by the tangible evidence in my hand, but none of us knew Yiddish, and so the article went back into the box.

Ten or so years later, I was telling what little I knew about this story to my friend Trudi, who then told me that she could read Yiddish. I organized an evening with Trudi and my father, and we once again got out the tin box, carefully unfolding the yellowed news clipping.

k Wednesday July

א מוטער׳ס אונגלי

TRANSLATION:

New York Wednesday July 1909

A Mother's Tragedy

Of 8 children, 7 have died. The last one has become ill. So Mrs. Schwartz attempts suicide.

An unfortunate mother, grief-stricken over the death of her 7 children, who died one after another in the last 6 months, yesterday tried to commit suicide by inhaling gas.

The unfortunate woman is Anna Schwartz of 270 Monroe Street. With rare iron fortitude, she bore her troubles of the last 6 months, which were enough to break a giant. Her only remaining child is now also critically ill, and yesterday she thought he was in danger of his life.

When Harry Schwartz, her husband, went last night to Beth Israel Hospital to the deathbed of 3-year-old Jacob, Mrs. Schwartz was in the depths of despair. The unfortunate woman was weeping and tearing her hair. She wouldn't let anyone console her.

Her husband asked a friend, Benjamin Shapiro, to keep an eye on his wife until he came back from the hospital. This foresight saved her. No sooner had he left, than she closed all the windows, sat down in a rocking chair, and took a gas hose in her mouth. Shapiro smelled gas, ran into the room, and pulled the hose out of her mouth. He called a policeman and by the time they brought an ambulance from Gouvenor Hospital, she had recovered consciousness.

They took Mrs. Schwartz to Essex Market Court, charged with attempted suicide. But after Magistrate Green heard the tragic story, he freed her.

"Our children have died one after the other," the woman related through tears and sighs. "We barely had time to bury one before the next one was dying. Only one child is left to me and we had to send him to the hospital yesterday. When I realized that I would be left without my last remaining child, I preferred to die with them than to live without them."

For the first time, I looked closely at the photograph. *This beautiful, proud-looking young woman is my grandmother,* I thought, with both pleasure and astonishment. *This is the same grey-haired woman who used to greet us at the door in Brooklyn when I was a child.* I flashed back to the matronly figure of Grandma as I knew her, wearing one of her floppy flowered dresses, standing in her solid black oxford shoes, her thick beige stockings rolled at the knees. But who are these children?

We decoded the caption under the montage:

"Of eight children, seven have died. The last one has become ill. So Mrs. Schwartz attempts suicide."

The story was devastating, and I was shocked as well to hear that my grandmother was brought before a judge, charged with the crime of attempted suicide. A crime? My father explained that, under the law, it was in fact a crime to commit suicide.

"But after Magistrate Green heard the tragic story, he freed her."

The article ended there, and my father seemed satisfied. Throughout the reading, he had seemed strangely more interested in the challenge of the translation than in the story itself. I, though, was deeply moved by the discovery of this family tragedy. And I had so many questions.

What disease had killed the eight children? Was it something they caught while packed into steerage on the passage to America? Something contracted after they arrived? What were their names? Most of all, I wondered, how had this woman—my grandmother—found the courage to start a family all over again, giving birth to my father's older brother just two years later, and my father not long after that?

My father didn't want to pursue it. This had always been a forbidden subject in his family, he said, and he repeated what he'd told me a decade earlier. "No one argued when my mother said '*Besser fargessen*,'" he said. And so I dropped it.

Later I marveled at the power of these two small words, words so absolute that they shut the door on our past—even decades after my grandmother's death. They still carried the message that opening that door was wrong, that wanting answers was dangerous. *Besser fargessen*, the words warned: Don't tread here.

It took me 30 more years to realize that I wasn't satisfied with "*besser fargessen*." With my mother approaching 94, blind and almost deaf, it is my last chance. With much probing from me, my mother plumbs her failing memory.

"We knew there had been other children," she says finally. "Every once in a while either Grandma or Grandpa would accidently mention something, but if anyone questioned them, they made it clear it was not for discussion. But when Grandma was in the nursing home, I finally found a way to make her talk. I went to her as one mother to another. I said, 'Mom, I understand how you don't want to talk about this. But I have children, too, and I want to protect the children they might someday have. I need to know if there's a genetic illness in the family.'

"'No, there was no genetic illness,' Grandma told me. '*Zorg dikh nisht*—no need to worry for the next generation.' She said there had been a measles epidemic on the boat coming to America—the last leg of the long journey from Russia—and one of the children had caught the disease. After they were reunited with Grandpa, who was waiting for them in the new country, the measles spread among the rest of the children—not all at once, but stretching over a period of six months.

"'One after the other they died,' Grandma said. 'One would die, and the next one would get sick and die, until the last one.' I asked Grandma if it had been the measles that caused the children's deaths. 'No,' she said, 'it was *lingen-ontsindung*'—pneumonia—which was a common complication of measles.

"After her suicide attempt, they sold everything they owned," my mother tells me, "and moved from the Lower East Side to Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, to 'get a fresh start'. Then Grandma went on to bear two more children, Uncle Sam and Daddy."

I question my mother for more clues about how these devastating losses affected my grandmother's relationship with my father and Uncle Sam, and I am able to extract a little more.

From ten children to two: the author's grandparents, Anna and Harry Schwartz; her Uncle Sam (top left), and her father, Frank.

When Grandma was in the nursing home, my mother finally found a way to make her talk. As one mother to another she said, "Mom, I understand how you don't want to talk about this—but I have children, too."

"On Friday nights before you kids were born," she says, "Daddy and I used to go to their house for *Shabbos* dinner. One Friday morning, Daddy woke up with a terrible cold so I called and told them we weren't coming. An hour later, without warning, Grandpa rang our doorbell. Grandma was so worried, she had sent him to make the trip by subway from Brooklyn—over an hour's trip—to make sure with his own eyes that Daddy was okay."

I wait for more.

"I remember Daddy saying that, as a child, if he wanted to get his way, he would refuse to eat. That frightened Grandma and Grandpa, and he would always win.

"When Uncle Sam was three he became very sick," she suddenly remembers. "Grandma was terrified and she sent Grandpa to the synagogue to have his name changed, to trick the *malach ha'mahves*, the angel of death, so the angel couldn't find him. That's how he became Sam."

Their childhood was emotionally starved, my mother continues.

"Grandma was afraid that if she showed affection, it might attract the *malach ha'mahves*'s attention and he'd come to take the children away. I saw this when Daddy and I were married—his mother never kissed him. The first time he ever had that experience was when my mother kissed him."

My mother sits quietly, and I think about how emotionally withholding my father was—towards all of us, my mother and also my brother and me. There was rarely hugging or kissing.

"If one of you kids got sick he'd get angry," my mother says. "I 'didn't call the doctor soon enough.' If I got sick, he'd be angry with me, which made no sense at all, except it must have been his way of expressing fear." My mother is understanding.

"What kind of person was Grandma?" I ask, thinking about her as a real person for the first time.

"She was a typical Jewish housewife, she kept a kosher home," my mother says. "She made wonderful knishes filled with potatoes or kasha, and she used to stretch her own strudel dough on the big kitchen table."

She made homemade gefilte fish, I remember, which I loved as a child, though I hated her chicken, which she boiled until it was falling apart and served along with the broth.

"The things that made her happy were you, her grandchildren," my mother says. "She'd sing Yiddish songs to you and watch your faces, *shepping naches*."

I remember the terrible years at the end, visiting her on occasional weekends in the disinfectant-reeking nursing home, feeling guilty and selfish as I recoiled at the sight of her sitting motionless in her chair, thin and pale, hairs growing out of her chin.

It is far too late to tell her how proud I am of her courage. ■

Ellen Azorin, an advertising writer and creative director for over 20 years, runs Cantaloupe Music Productions, booking Brazilian (and other Latin) music and jazz. She's working on a collection of essays about family and relationships.

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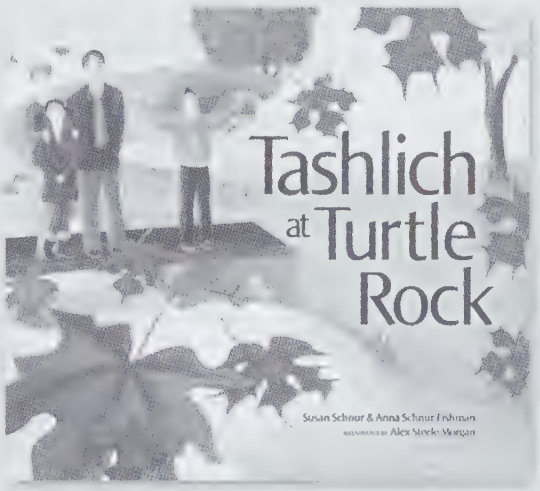

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The Portrait

ALGERIA 1919

fiction by PHYLLIS CAROL AGINS

She, Etamine, leaves no mark as she moves through the *medina's* narrow streets that lead to the new town the French have built. No one has to cry, *Baleck, baleck, Out of the way*. She clings to the walls, never minding the water that puddles there or the pockets of dog piss. She'll return home in the same state she has left—clean, without dust on her shoes. Even her shadow on the whitewashed walls surprises her.

She knows she should have died on the day she was born, and her real mother should have survived instead. There were so many children already inhabiting their two rooms. A mother was needed to raise those children. *A house without a mother is death*, Etamine thinks. Slight, with her pale hair and eyes, she was the one responsible for that death.

Within hours, Etamine was living with her oldest sister, Sadia, in the rooms above the grocery owned by her husband Jacques. There, the family pretended that Sadia was her mother, Jacques her father, and their son, Maurice, her brother. In the early days, Sadia nursed her sister along with Maurice, who was only days older. The milk forever tasted sour to Etamine, even accusing. Still as Etamine grew, she called her sister—*Maman*, and Jacques—*Papa*. But alone, she always thought, *Sadia, my sister, who must hate me because I killed our mother, who should have lived instead.*

Etamine was born in blood, and it has washed away her outline, so she leaves no footprints when she walks, makes no noise when she sleeps. She, Etamine, is air that doesn't move, a dream that no one should have invented.

Because she is only air, Etamine has the vision. She can easily slip between the thoughts of women and discover what they are feeling before they sense it themselves. She understands why their hearts race in the street. How they lust before night falls. Men are a mystery to her, for their minds are blocked with a hard barrier, stronger than mountains that rise around Sétif.

But women she knows, as she knew her own mother before her birth. Has found her mother's fatigue and the angry hands that pushed against the belly holding Etamine—*Not another child*. Sometimes she believes those hands wanted her to die—expelled in a mass of blood vessels with an unformed, pulsing heart. But that vision grows more distant as the newer ones take its place, sometimes filling her head with so many women's voices that Etamine thinks she will grow deaf.

When she was only three, she found Sadia's thoughts tucked into her small bed. Under Maurice's bed, Sadia placed love and hope. But in Etamine's bed, Sadia deposited only anger and guilt. A resentment that sprung from an ever-flowing, wild river.

Even on the days just before the Sabbath or Passover, when Sadia furiously cleans the house, Etamine senses the anger. Not only for her, she realizes, but for everyone and everything except Maurice. It settles on the chairs, peers from the cabinets, hovers around the mezuzah at the door, and slides along the floors that her sister scrubbed. It descends to the grocery. And there, Etamine, finds its source.

Jacques is much older than her sister. It isn't only his white hair and his knobby hands or the blue veins along his nose and across his legs. She can't listen to his thoughts, but knows his fatigue.

"You only have two children, Jacques," Etamine hears her sister whisper at night. "Show more interest in them."

"I love the children," Jacques replies. "Remember I wanted more."

"Ah," Sadia hisses, "how you hold that against me. I didn't want to lose five infants."

"God's will," Jacques murmurs.

"The work of the *djinn*. And you still demanding to fill my womb, even when you know I can't carry them."

"I only wanted to love you the way I knew how."

"This marriage was your idea. You found me and took me from my parents."

"Sadia," Jacques asks before he turns to sleep, "will you never be content?"

FROM "MARGINALIA," ROCHELLE RUBINSTEIN, ©2007. WWW.ROCHELLERUBINSTEIN.COM

Some nights Etamine leaves her bed to study them as they sleep. Even when she was just ten, she already understood a lot about the love between men and women. For a long time now, she can detect the eggs that descend into the wombs of women, and wait there for the part of men they need to make them whole. She feels the wash of menstrual fluids that fill their quarter each month, and the disappointment of women in the *hammam* who wish for children.

At her parents' bed she finds another presence that reaches out to her. On all the nights that Etamine watches, the spirit of Jacques' long dead, first wife rests alongside him. Sometimes the spirit wraps herself between Jacques' arms and legs, almost disappearing into his very flesh.

Is it the djinn? Etamine wonders. *The evil spirit that Sadia worries about every day?*

On another night, the dead wife turns toward her, studying the girl who should have died. Etamine grows warm when the spirit swirls around, piercing her flesh with small pricks of understanding. She breathes in and out, taking in the spirit with each inhalation, filling herself with another time.

She sees then. Jacques when he was young, with black hair and a full black beard. With brilliant blue eyes so unlike the watery, yellowed ones he views the world with now. With strong limbs and a straight back. And with dark hair covering his chest and descending to the maleness that stood as if at attention like she'd seen the French soldiers straighten their backs before their lieutenant.

Sitting before Jacques so long ago was that first wife. Her copper hair rolled in waves down her back as she held him to her and wrapped her limbs around his hips, until her belly grew hugely white. Etamine can feel the child living beneath the skin. Then the woman's legs are wide open, and Etamine knows that this is a birth like her own, and that someone is to die. But when she sees Jacques bend over the limp baby and the dead woman, she understands.

Even years later Jacques has willed his lost wife to remain. And she spends each night between Jacques and Sadia, so that they would never truly be together. Etamine, too, wishes the spirit to remain—warming the house where there had been only cold.

"Come with me today, Etamine." Sadia is preparing for a trip to the hills that surround Sétif. "We need to collect plants before the cold comes," her sister insists.

At home Sadia speaks little to Etamine. But on the hills she always explains which plants are important and why. How to use the seeds or the twigs or the dried leaves. Which to pick in the spring, which in the fall. How to fix broken bones, minimize the asthma, calm insect bites. Which feed the body, which cure diabetes, or stop bleeding, or cut the pain of childbirth. And which plants increase the function of the liver and build up the red blood cells so necessary for life.

"You must wrap the plants carefully," her sister explains. "Be careful not to disturb the part that is the medicine. " Etamine watches her sister carefully pluck the plants. "Then we cover everything with brown paper to keep it safe." She folds the plants in the paper Jacques uses to wrap groceries in the store.

Etamine writes quickly in a small book she carries for those moments as Sadia explains.

"Draw this flower in your book," Sadia says, "so you won't forget."

Etamine sketches the plant, how it sits in the earth, how the leaves are shaped, and the size and color of the flowers.

"You will be a healer like me," Sadia adds.

These are the times when Etamine is truly happy. When she's preparing the plants next to her sister, and when she waits for the bread to bake in the community oven. Below street level, lingering near the ovens, Etamine feels as solid as the loaves. She loves the rhythm of the men who take the unbaked bread and shove it into the oven with wooden paddles, then retrieve the already baked in one movement like a dance. She carries the bread home, still warm and fragrant.

And she is happy in the steamy *hammam* with the other women, where she rests with her back against the marble wall, just next to the jets that breathe out eucalyptus-scented steam. She loves to watch the steam filled with women's sighs and laughter rise to the ocular openings in the domed ceiling.

Every woman knows that magic of another kind happens in the *hammam*—mothers are searching for wives for their sons. While they chat, they measure the qualities of the families and the size of daughters' hips. Who is wide enough to give birth easily to many sons? Who has breasts perfect both for pleasure and suckling? In the *hammam* even nipples become a commodity.

Occasionally, Etamine watches Sadia engage in one of those conversations. The mother of some boy looks at her as she hugs the wall.

"This is my daughter," Sadia will start. "She reads French and Arabic. She helps in my husband's grocery, and her almond cakes are even better than the ones in the French *pâtisserie*. And," her sister adds solemnly, "She will bleed on her wedding night," Sadia promises with a smile. In the world of unions, an intact hymen is as important as wide hips.

Despite the warnings, some girls have forgotten the cautions against carnal knowledge before marriage. Etamine can find them in the *hammam*—the girls who throw away their virginity. She encounters their freedom and wishes it for herself.

Not that she dreams of becoming some man's wife. Maybe, she thinks, *maybe I just want to disappear into the medina*. There she could heal all the ones who need her. There would be no marriage bargaining, no stained sheets on her wedding night. She, who should have died, can spend her life chasing death from the homes of the sick.

She can easily slip between the thoughts of women and discover what they are feeling before they sense it themselves. She understands why their hearts race in the street. How they lust before night falls.

Etamine knows she's not allowed to walk the streets of the *medina* alone. It's Maurice's job to follow her to the bakery. Although he'd rather run off and sketch the world he's discovered outside the city, he still has to protect her from whatever danger threatens a virgin of marriageable age. Even now, after she's sixteen and too old for school.

Finally, one day, Maurice disappears. He's left a note for his parents—declaring his desire to be an artist. Sadia rages with worry. Jacques ignores her and descends to the grocery.

"He'll come home tonight," she tells her sister after three days. She senses Maurice is on his way home even before he appears in the street.

"Can you be sure?" Sadia asks, her eyes softening.

"I promise."

"I thought it was the Eye," Sadia goes on, "furious that I had stolen so many back from death. My son for the debt." She kneads the bread into its final shape.

"Not this time," Etamine says. "Not with Maurice."

Then this will be the last morning that she can walk alone. She feels a sudden bravery that pushes her to leave the bakery and wander the streets she's always avoided. Even the bakers are surprised to see that she doesn't take her usual place by the oven. *They've grown used to me—like the cat that always wanders underfoot.*

She follows the streets that lead to the French part of the city. She wants to visit the wide boulevards planted with flowers. To pause when she desires, drink when she needs, walk more if she has the energy.

In the center of town, Etamine finds the fountain that the French built. The stone woman crouches beneath the elaborate iron lamp with its many arms. She's bare-breasted and poised to run at any moment, to leap over the fountain that flows beneath her and to disappear.

Maybe it was the crouching woman, she thinks later, that pushed her more into the new city the French added over the years. Long before she turns to face the three soldiers, she knows they are following her. Instinct tells her to turn back, but she walks on, down the side streets that are as straight as the grand boulevard—so unlike the curling medina. They are laughing behind her, speaking French and swallowing some of their words as though they're ashamed of speaking them. They follow her for blocks, sometimes moving closer and then dropping back. She can't find their thoughts, but their voices make her heart beat so that her ears are filled with her own rushing blood. She stops in the middle of a block. It is *midi*, when the shops close for *la sieste* because the mid-day heat can only be survived at home.

"Belle," one of them says, moving closer.

"And untouched," another laughs. He lets his fingers wander along her back.

"Should we see for ourselves?" the third asks. He pulls her headscarf away from her face.

They grab her by the arms and lead her behind a large building where no one will hear her cries.

But Etamine doesn't cry out. She is silent as always, her clear eyes focusing on the fragment of brilliant blue above her, on the swallows that choose this moment to dance in the clear air.

"I saw her first," one of them insists, his face determined like the rutting dogs' she's seen in the medina.

She wonders if they'll fight over her the way the French are known to fight over everything. Stories have reached Jacques' store about the boredom of the young soldiers and their rowdiness—even violence—after they've drunk too much. She breathes in to see if she can detect the scent of liquor. Instead she finds stale perspiration and an emotion she can't identify—even when the first climbs onto her.

When they're done with her, the third one threatens, "If you tell, we'll find you and slit the throats of your family—all of them." He smiles, but his eyes are hard-edged and cold.

Finally, they leave her there—with her blood staining the ground beneath her. With a bite mark on her left breast and a handful of her hair resting forlornly next to her head. Etamine walks home slowly. Past the hamman and the bakery where she has left the day's bread. She carries the lock of hair in her hand instead.

They cry over her as if someone has died. Sadia throws herself at Jacques and pounds against his chest with furious fists.

"You and your French," she screams in Arabic. "You'll never speak that language in my house again."

"I'll go to the police." Jacques sobs, and it sounds worse to Etamine than the cries of all the women in all of Sétif. "Etamine can identify the soldiers and we'll have justice."

"And can you refashion her virginity?" Sadia screams. "Her future is lost."

"Some man will still want her," Jacques answers, his voice filled with hope. "Someone will recognize her goodness."

"No one will ever want her," Sadia insists. "No one."

They put her to bed, and Sadia carefully washes her. Between the anger and disappointment, Etamine senses something different flow from her sister for the first time. It is unrecognizable at first. But finally, she knows it is love.

One day after the soldiers and for the next three days, Sadia forces a bitter liquid between Etamine's lips. Maurice came home that first night to find his family alternately hysterical and grieving. Jacques sits on a low stool as if someone has died. Sadia boils leaves into a thick paste to press between Etamine's legs and crushes seeds to make the liquid she forces the girl to drink. She knows that something worse than a ruined hymen is about to happen. Sadia fights against the Eye itself, the evil that might cause infection to set in or worse—to allow the baby that has already started to take root. In the other room, members of the family arrive to grieve in low voices.

Maurice stands above her, his face wiped clean of emotion. She searches for his thoughts, but as usual, the minds of men are hidden from her. But she feels him guarding her with a concern that hasn't existed before. Some nights, he holds a flashlight over her face while he believes she's sleeping. Then she can hear the scratching of a pencil against paper. He draws her pain and his guilt. Capturing her face after this great change.

On the forth day, the bleeding starts. Sadia tries to remain calm, but the fear pulses in the silent room. Finally Sadia lays a warmed stone over Etamine's heart.

The stone is calling to her, isn't it? Telling her to stop sleeping so and to rise. Telling her bone marrow to rebuild the red blood. Telling the red blood to stop flowing. Telling her spirit that the baby would never live. Telling the lost baby that it will be the only one to ever start within her. Insisting that she has a future after all.

When Etamine is well enough to walk through the streets again, they try to stop her.

"Maurice will come with you," Jacques insists.

"I will, Sister," Maurice says without his usual resentment. He looks happy to have a chance to redeem himself.

"Etamine, please," is all Sadia says.

But she refuses their warnings and their fear. Some will say she never wanted to marry. Some will say she really hated men after that day. But, truly, she reaches what she has wanted all along. She, Etamine, who was born in blood and who should have died, is finally free. ■

Phyllis Carol Agins married into an Algerian Jewish family eight years ago. "The Portrait" is a chapter from her recently completed novel, The Protection of Salt. *Visit phylliscarolagins.com to learn more.*

LABOR PAINS

They're calling this a "mancession." But for many women, the current downturn is a story of sudden unemployment, deep frustration and a jobless economic recovery. Inside these economic storms, women are still trying to pull off their customary magic at home—with diminished resources.

But beyond the downturn, the essence of work itself is changing. The Feminist Revolution sent women to work, and they squeezed themselves into the old form—long days, inflexible hours, endless commutes—like Cinderella's sisters and the glass slipper. It didn't fit well. Today 30 percent of American workers are self-employed; call it the Freelance Revolution. It comes with downsides, like no benefits and no security. But it also presents an amazing opportunity for women (and men) to rethink how to make work work for them.

Freelance work is risky. Those of us who do it are flying without a parachute, and sudden drops are dangerous. In the following pages, guest editor Sarah Blustain introduces you to a visionary woman, Sara Horowitz, who has created the Freelancers Union as a new form of safety net for the new form of work. You will also hear the voices of women reminding us how central work is to our lives, and how hard it is—financially and spiritually—when old-fashioned work disappears. And you will see how feminist agenda items like equal pay, equal status and flex-time fare—in the Jewish world, in the rabbinate, in high-end corporate jobs—when jobs are scarce.

Sarah Blustain, a writer and editor living in Montclair, NJ, is a Lilith contributing editor.

UNION MADE

Meet the woman who thinks there's a better way to organize for the way we work today.

by Sarah Blustain

When I spot her from across the street, Sara Horowitz is ducking into a coffee shop surrounded by brownstones in the quiet Brooklyn neighborhood of Park Slope. My first impression is that she looks small. Not short. Not thin. Just small.

She turns out to be funny that way: with straight brown hair, a barely perceptible touch of makeup, and an unprepossessing air, she seems at first a bit like a social worker, or even a librarian.

But Horowitz is, emphatically, not small. Founder and executive director of the Freelancers Union, Horowitz has created, in 15 years, an institution with nearly 150,000 members and multiple arms—including the union, its for-profit insurance company, and a political action committee (PAC)—as well as $100 million in gross revenues. She has received a MacArthur "genius" grant for her creation of the union, has been listed as one of Esquire magazine's "Best and Brightest," and this year was one of Crain's "25 People to Watch."

Most impressively of all, she recognized the significance of a major shift in American employment—toward self-employment—years before almost anyone else. In this she was, really, a visionary, seeing just how much would change—for good and for bad—as the old "ideal worker" model is thrown out in favor of much more fluid and flexible definitions of work. And now that independent workers comprise one of the fastest growing employment sectors in the United States, her 15-year-old organization is prepared to offer them practical benefits of membership, like group health insurance, as well as the opportunity to mobilize as a class of underserved and under-accounted-for workers. What she is working with is what we all now recognize as the new economy, an economy in

which workers claim flexibility, mobility and work-life balance as their rights; an economy in which being employed, in the old sense of the word, is often an impossibility or an afterthought; and an economy in which all the risk is absorbed by the worker herself.

The Freelancers Union members, whose numbers have doubled in the last year, include consultants and independent workers from many fields. The largest categories include TV and film producers, advertising workers, graphic designers, computer and IT professionals. In other words, it is largely a creative-class union, though there are also a hefty number of health care workers, financial service consultants, and even some taxi drivers. You might think it would be hard to get such a diverse group to unify behind any agenda at all. But the biases in employment law and taxation against the self employed are so severe and systemic that Horowitz feels she has all the agenda she needs. "Well, you don't get mobilized around H.R.41091, but you do get mobilized over the realization that you're getting fucked, and that if you're not coming together with other people, you're not going to do well."

HOROWITZ CRITICIZES THE LACK OF PROTECTION FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED. "YOU GET MOBILIZED OVER THE REALIZATION THAT YOU'RE GETTING FUCKED."

When we sit down to talk in the Park Slope coffee shop, Horowitz puts me on notice that she wants to talk shop. There have been profiles of her before, she says, but "it's usually about me and my grandfather and blah blah blah, but not 'let's open up the hood and see what makes this engine run'." And so … under the hood we go, and it soon becomes clear that that's where Horowitz likes to be.

The key insight behind Horowitz's work is that independent workers are ill-served by the legal and tax systems that have been in place for decades, and as a result they are largely unprotected against a host of ills. You know those monthly Department of Labor employment statistics? Although independent workers now make up about a third of all American workers, they are not counted in those numbers. And you know all those benefits extended under the recent stimulus package to help workers? Not a cent was directed to a program for that same one-third of workers who work for themselves. These workers are simply on no one's radar screen.

Horowitz lays out very simply what these new workers need: a new safety net, one that breaks free from the "nostalgia" for employer-based systems. They need to be able to buy insurance collectively, since they can't participate in employer-based plans; they need some kind financial backup for the lean years, the way employer-based unemployment insurance exists for company-based workers; they need to be covered by labor laws, including anti-discrimination and disability law, the way employees are; they need to be able to turn to the state departments of labor for recourse the way employees can when companies fail to pay. "And the worst part of it," she says, sounding a little mad, "is that this group is really driving the economic growth of

The Cost of Being a Woman

The gender gap in salaries has made headlines in recent months as progressives pushed for passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act in Congress, which was meant to address data showing that women make 77 cents for every dollar made by men. The bill failed in November.

According to a new survey, women working in the Jewish community needed that law. NYU professor Steven M. Cohen recently carried out a comprehensive survey of Jewish professionals, asking about everything from diversity to education to level of Jewish identification. The report (at www.bjpa.org) gives a good snapshot of who is working in the Jewish community these days.

In the fine print one finds this stunning discovery: Based on surveys of 2,435 Jewish professionals in the United States and Canada, in organizations large and small, working as administrators, fundraisers, Jewish educators and more, women make up two-thirds of Jewish communal professionals, and yet they are paid, on average $.75 on the dollar for their work.

In a field where the median income is about $78,000, Cohen writes, "among full-time Jewish communal professionals, women significantly trail men in compensation, with an overall gap of $28,000." Part of the gender gap in pay, he notes, is due to differences in position and number of hours worked. (Not explored in the survey are the reasons behind that disparity, though there may be a clue in the fact that Cohen found little to no gender difference in salary at the entry level.)

Nonetheless, when Cohen controlled for these differences—"holding constant age, years in the field, level of responsibility, hours worked, and degrees earned"—women's salaries still lagged by about $20,000. That's equivalent to what Cohen labels as "the net cost of being a woman in Jewish communal life." Here's hoping the Jewish community won't wait for a Congressional prod to do the right thing.

S.B.

the country, so it's really a crime to not be paying attention to it."

For Horowitz, establishing union benefits and confronting the status quo through advocacy go hand in hand. "Business sets up shop for business. It's not to say that every business person doesn't care about workers, but that's not their job.... So you had children working, you had 18-hour days, and it wasn't til you had a social movement"—she's talking about the creation of craft-workers unions and the passage of workers' rights legislation during the Progressive Era in the United States from the 1880s to the 1920s—that it ended. Similarly, she says, today employers need a more flexible workforce, and they are taking advantage of the absence of law to achieve their goals. "But it's really because we haven't had any social movement that says to elected officials and to government that we are going to vote you out of office—and we will."

Horowitz's reading of history also suggested to her that "all great collectives have had an insurance company." And so one of the major steps her union has taken is the creation, in 2008, of the Freelancers Insurance Company, a for-profit entity that is wholly owned by the union and that supports its functioning. (There are no union dues.) For that to happen, she had to convince New York State to allow freelancers to band together to buy group health insurance; when New York did that, in 2008, it became the first state to do so.

While Horowitz is focused on the big picture, it is just this kind of day-to-day improvement in the lives of her members, one pragmatic step at a time, that she takes on. A major victory was the 2009 revision of New York's Unincorporated Business Tax, which had been in place since 1966 and essentially forced the self-employed to pay a punitive double tax. The union launched a campaign, working with New York state legislators and New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg to overturn the UBT. It was a big win, and helped to garner the attention of New York's congressional delegation. Giving an average of $3,400 annually back to New York's freelancers, it also won the union some significant grassroots support.

Among the union's other efforts are:

Ensuring that independent workers are counted in employment and unemployment rates and metrics that track freelancers' contribution to the economy. As union materials put it, "one study in New York City found that the self-employed drove two-thirds of job growth since 1975, but no such study exists at the national level."

Ensuring protection against "unpaid wages." As things stand, if a company's employee is not paid, she has the right to go to a state's Department of Labor and have that DOL investigate, levy fines, and

"LET'S LOOK UNDER THE HOOD." FREELANCERS ARE DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH, SO IT'S A CRIME NOT TO PAY ATTENTION TO THEM.

To Flex or Not to Flex

Remember back before the downturn, when progressive efforts to make life easier for working mothers (and fathers) were in style? Flex time, paternity leave, job shares ... so much hope in the air.

But for those still holding old-fashioned jobs with benefits, the downturn is turning up the pressure to devote ever more time to the office—leaving the home fires untended. Experts say that there is a significant stigma on flexible work options, even in companies that offer it. Lauren Leader Chivee, of the Center for Work-Life Policy, finds that because of job anxiety during the downturn, employees feel more and more that "you have to be in the office with your jacket on the back of your chair to show that you're available." Joan Williams, director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, notes that "in workplaces where work-family balance policies were already 'highly stigmatized,' workers have become more reluctant to use them."

However, Williams adds, "In places where they were accepted, they have stayed accepted." Those small signs of signs of progress may be the silver lining. Shifra Bronznick runs Advancing Women Professionals (AWP), a non-profit group dedicated to getting women promoted into positions of leadership in Jewish organizations. She acknowledges that while this economy makes it harder for her to convince organizations to embrace flexible work options, some do recognize the cost when organizations lose talent because of inflexible work-family policies. "What's really interesting from my point of view [is that] we've been able to make serious headway in this environment. A conversation has been started that they can't go back on." To date, 40 Jewish non-profits have joined AWP's Better Work, Better Life campaign, and have improved their policies on parental leave and flexibility.

Outside the Jewish world, some institutions have taken the downturn as an opportunity to overhaul their systems. Chivee cites companies that created new work-at-home policies in an effort to radically reduce their real estate costs—companies that have "achieved millions of dollars in real estate savings and won major points among their employees, particular their women employees." But, she says, there's a sad catch: "As long as programs look like they're focused on helping women, they just don't work."

S.B.

even impose jail time on repeat offenders. But when an independent worker goes unpaid, she can ask for payment until she's blue in the face, or pay to go to small claims court, which has a maximum claim amount of $5,000. Horowitz has used her PAC to get a bill introduced to give independent workers the same access to DOL justice as employees have.

Expanding worker protections to include independent contractors. Such an effort would extend to independent worker measures like workers' compensation and anti-discrimination laws, from which they are currently excluded.

Creating a system of unemployment protection parallel to traditional unemployment insurance, possibly built around tax-advantaged savings accounts.

Offering a better kind of insurance, one that would keep costs low by guiding people away from expensive and unnecessary types of care, while always keeping the door open for exceptions. ("I am obsessed with colonoscopies," Horowitz says, and she is. She can tell you how 77 percent of the procedures done in New York City are done with "super-duper anesthesia" that drives the cost from $400 to $1,400; how the drug is used only 15 percent of the time in the western part of the United States and almost never in Europe and Asia; and how, unless you have a history of trauma, extreme anxiety, or colon-related illness, the drug is unnecessary.)

All these initiatives are nascent efforts, with New York state as the primary pilot locale, but the idea is to take them bigger, and farther—and to offer many more things that union members need and that unions offered a century ago. Things like union health care centers; a union bank; and union housing (not in Manhattan, Horowitz says, a little speculatively, but the "outer boroughs are very interesting and real estate is a lot cheaper in some of the other cities where we have members.")

Taking the ripples even further, Horowitz connects her work to the way the next generation of workers is challenging the status quo, "asking the really profound questions of how you want to live your life. We want to enable people to really have the power to make decisions on how they want to lead their lives. And so they may want a gig or two that brings in real money. But there are real things

FREELANCERS UNION POSTERS

that people are going to give up and that is going to be that idea of having so much disposable cash. People are really going to be trading in time. That's the part that really ties in with all these interesting other movements that are coming together about how we consume and … what we eat and what we do to the earth."

In her own life, she and her husband, a labor lawyer, literally "trade in time," dividing up the work-week days into morning and evening "shifts," during which the on-duty parent is responsible for domestic duties and for the couple's 10-year old daughter. All the negotiating is not easy, but she believes that the new, more independent workforce will have more control about how and when they want to spend time working and with family. "When you're piecing out your career, when you're really managing it and you have more control," she says, "it does make having children part of the equation."

After an hour and a half under the hood, I somewhat apologetically press Horowitz again for at least the short version of what she called the "grandfather blah blah blah" story. And so she tries.

Horowitz had something of a labor-conscious childhood. Her father's father, whom she didn't know, had been a vice president of the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union and part of the inner circle of legendary union leader David Dubinsky. Her father was a Bund socialist labor lawyer, her mother a unionized teacher who had been raised "just regular immigrant Eastern European Orthodox" and who in her 20s left the Orthodox community of her birth and moved to a bohemian block in Brooklyn Heights. The family had little money and lived in a one-bedroom, rent-stabilized apartment. "My parents had the dining room and my sister and I had the bedroom—but we had a really great view of the harbor. It wasn't pleasant, it would have been really nice to have a bath and a half. But … it gave me a lot of insights." One of the first ad campaigns the Freelancers Union did, which ran in New York City subways, was headlined "Welcome to Middle-Class Poverty." "And I knew it," says Horowitz, "because that's how we were raised."

Passed down through the generations, union work was Horowitz's second nature. "I don't know how far back you want to go," she told me, "but I called a strike when I was in 8th grade." It was International Women's Day, 1976. During the silent meeting that opened the day at her Quaker school, she stood up and announced, "Today is International Women's Day and all the girls should go on strike." She went to French class, and when she got back, the girls had walked out. It led to a day of conversations about "what are all the issues for girls, and what were the things that were going on at the school that we didn't like. But what really [registered for] me about it is that you could really do that. … It was just a thing I knew I was going to be involved in."

Horowitz went on to study labor history at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, followed by law school and three years as a public defender. But it was in her next job that the plight of the independent worker became clear. She was hired as an independent contractor with a union-side labor firm. The job was clearly a staff job—she worked full time, had business cards, and was supposed to represent herself as a member of the firm—but didn't pay benefits. Punning on NYC's powerful Transit Workers Union, she and a few others in that boat "used to joke that we were forming the transient workers union." Tag line: "The union makes us not so weak."

Spurred also by a case she was working on, in 1995 Horowitz took a one-year "intellectual sabbatical" at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government to figure out "how is this baby going to work." It was a deeply rich year of thinking and planning and fundraising, but one class that really crystallized the issues for her was a history of American democracy, which in part traced the waves of individualism and pluralism in the country. "I realized we had to think about what would be an evolution of that, [an institution] that has to enable people to be individuals but also to come together in a new way."

It's not always easy to situate Horowitz and the Freelancer's Union in the panoply of pro-worker organizations. Though she was given support from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and the social entrepreneur group Echoing Green, "the traditional lefties didn't get it," she recalls, "and because I wasn't doing it in a protest-in-your-face way, I got abandoned by the traditional lefty foundations."

The union movement wasn't much interested either. While ramping up to start the union in 1995, Horowitz convinced the AFL-CIO to fly her down to Washington with a proposal to create a division for independent workers within the king of all unions. They weren't interested. "I like to make a joke that they said 'Well, you're too young and too female'. They didn't say that exactly. You know, it was an irrelevance. I was this young woman who had no members and no money and no board, and an idea. And it was just not going to happen." More importantly, because her organization doesn't engage in the wage and benefits negotiations that have traditionally been the work of unions, she can run into skepticism about its true union blood.

But for all her hearkening back to history and the calls for collective power, Horowitz herself isn't eager to end up lumped with the hard left. "I often feel

"THERE ARE REAL THINGS THAT PEOPLE ARE GOING TO GIVE UP AND THAT IS GOING TO BE… HAVING SO MUCH DISPOSABLE CASH. PEOPLE ARE REALLY GOING TO BE TRADING IN TIME."

like I'm not a member of the current left but a member of the coming left," she says—a left that talks about the collective good without dependence on government or on employer/union-based systems for support. One suspects she feels that the educated but struggling members of her union are not welcomed under the left's umbrella, and she is quick to chide the left for being "so unempathetic." That attitude, she says, is "'If you're not poor then I don't have to think about you.' I really don't like that. It's like Pol Pot or the Khmer Rouge. I don't believe that, and I think it's really hard-hearted."

The Jewish piece of Horowitz's perspective is implicit, but strong. A four-time Hebrew school dropout, she is today an active Reform Jew. But as with her union, she spreads her Jewish umbrella as wide as it will go. "I actually believe that there are all pathways to God and I just happen to be a Jew. … I think that when you're blessed in the sense of believing in something it doesn't matter, it doesn't have to be religion, it's that higher thing that is higher than yourself. That, I think, that is religion to me."

"WHEN YOU'RE PIECING OUT YOUR CAREER, WHEN YOU'RE REALLY MANAGING IT AND YOU HAVE MORE CONTROL, IT DOES MAKE HAVING CHILDREN PART OF THE EQUATION."

She goes on: "I am going to misquote this—is it Maimonides? It's some really big guy up there—that says you actually have an obligation to keep at it, you don't have an obligation to succeed," she continues. "And that's so what I believe in. … We live in this society where [people say] 'I'm never going to achieve anything so why try', and that's so nihilistic; it's really bullshit. I'd rather try and fail, and try and fail, and try and fail, and then when I die, well, I tried a lot, as it turned out." ■

Are Teachers Unions Losing Their Clout?

It didn't look right, but it was classic Randi Weingarten. The president of the 1.5 million-strong American Federation of Teachers strode the red carpet with union-bashing filmmaker Davis Guggenheim at October's D.C. opening of "Waiting for Superman," the high-profile public education documentary that casts the AFT president in the villain's role. Weingarten has not shied from the thorny debates over school reform, and as a result has become one of the most visible labor leaders in the country.

For a generation (or more) of Jewish women, teaching was the default career choice, promising job security, good hours, intellectual challenges and—importantly—work that served the social good. So what happens to teachers in public schools is of particular interest to Jews, whose support for public education—coexisting with the push for Hebrew day schools within the Jewish community—is widespread.

Weingarten took the reins at the AFT in 2007, altering the pale, male, and sometimes stale order of things atop America's labor movement. She came out publicly weeks before taking the job, becoming the first lesbian to lead any American union. For most of her tenure, Weingarten has faced an unprecedented school privatization effort led from Washington. The debate around these plans—which amounts to a direct attack on the teacher unions that were major supporters of Obama's campaign—carries no shortage of irony for the AFT. Obama's Race to the Top fund dangles $4 billion in stimulus money before cash-strapped states. Rewards go to states that open their districts to more non-union charter schools, tie teacher evaluations to student test scores, and extract concessions on job security and pay from teachers unions.

Weingarten has been tirelessly open to Obama's corporate reform agenda—an effort that has become fashionable with backing from anti-union players like the Gates Foundation and Teach for America. Her emphasis on collaboration with all parties at the education reform table comes at a time when resistance seems more urgent.

Weingarten has been criticized by some local teacher unions for cheering on "bold," "progressive" reforms that translate to weaker job security for teachers, and for a commitment to divisive merit pay schemes that further entrench standardized test prep in the classroom.

Still, an abiding fear of obliteration has taken root within the AFT, and threatens a paralysis that could lead to, well, the union's obliteration. The hammer keeps falling, and a supposed friendly face is swinging it. Weingarten's consistent plea for a seat at the table with the education reform vanguard has already been granted (she sits on the Democratic National Committee, after all). Weingarten's call for collaboration feels nice, but no longer sufficient to protect the rights of teachers and students. And it betrays a lack of faith in union members' ability to organize, right as the union—and the idea of public education—face mortal danger.

PAUL ABOWD

AGE OF INNOCENCE

For older women suddenly out of work, retooling themselves for the New Economy and the Internet Age is a double challenge.

It's true that all boats recede in a receding tide, but those who offer vocational support through Jewish agencies say they're seeing something new: the people who are coming to them for help in significant numbers are members of the middle class they would not have seen before—"people," notes Meryl Kordower, associate vice president for Career and Employment Services at FEGS Health and Human Services System in New York City, "who had supported UJA-Federation but who had never needed its help before."

And within this middle class, they say the untold story is the employment crisis among those over 50, for whom changing jobs frequently and updating technological skills—hallmarks of the new economy—might not come so easy. Kordower oversees a recession-era project of the UJA-Federation called Connect-to-Care, which was designed to meet needs emerging in the Jewish community as a result of the economic downturn. She estimates that of the approximately 2,000 people who have received personalized career counseling from them, about 65 percent were older than 50 (with many over 60); 95 percent had a B.A. or higher degree, and most were coming from professional and managerial positions.

For women over 50, these experts say, searching for work can be doubly hard for a variety of reasons. Some have been in the same administrative jobs for two

PEOPLE WHO ARE COMING FOR HELP IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS ARE MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS WHO HAD SUPPORTED UJA-FEDERATION BUT HAD NEVER NEEDED ITS HELP BEFORE.

"Not to work, to me, is an affront."

Benita Gayle-Almeleh, 55, New York, NY

Sounds like you've worked most of your adult life.

I have worked in the Jewish community for 26 or 27 years professionally, and I've been pretty much unemployed for a number of years now. Mostly I have been in community relations and advocacy. And right now I am not employed at all and in an active job search.

Do you spend all day looking for work?

That would be hard to do. I probably spend a good concentrated two to three hours a day, and when I say concentrated I mean uninterrupted going from one thing to the next, writing cover letters, retooling for the eighty-ninth time my resume. It's like furniture in a small room. There are a number of things you can do with it, but after a while you're still moving the furniture in the small room.

Aside from the financial changes, what challenges has unemployment offered for you?

I have teenage daughter, a freshman in college, who thank God still sees me as a very strong model. I've really had to think about how to balance any messages I'm sending off about really long term unemployment with how she sees me as a professional role model and as a feminist role model. We've talked about it. When she was a couple of years younger, she said 'I know, mommy, this hasn't been easy for you or good for you, but I have to tell you that having you around has been good for me.' Which you want to hear, but by the same token, you want to give off all sorts of positive messages about responsibility and working and things like that, and without a job that's been a challenge.

What alternatives do you see for yourself?

I wish I had a crystal ball. I wake up every morning wishing I had a crystal ball, because if I had a little indication of what was at the end, it would make the getting there a little easier.

Of all the things I ever wanted to be when I grew up, unemployed was not one of them. That's just the bottom line. Most days I'm okay about it, okay there's another day, I have to do this, but there's that day every once in a while that you hate the world. I'm 55, so I was really at the beginning of the second feminist wave. For me to not work, to me, is an affront. Because I believe that I am really able to make serious contributions and I want to, and instead I'm sitting at the dining room table with my laptop.

decades, and never expected to be out in the job market again. Many have been providing what they considered "second" incomes in their families; as the recession took jobs and income from their spouses, these women have found themselves needing to make up more of the household income. Still others had crafted careers in flexible fields—say, opening a private practice in social work, or doing communications work from home—to accommodate a family schedule; as that contract work has dried up, they too are looking for full-time work. And some have been homemakers by choice, and are looking for paid employment for the first time in decades.

"There is so much more pressure on women right now to help do their part with the family income," says Abby Snay, executive director of Jewish Vocational Services in San Francisco. "We're working with younger women and older women who say that they wouldn't be working or that they wouldn't be working full time." She also notes the added pressures of taking care of both of kids and of older family members, because there simply isn't money to hire the extra help they might need.

Esther-Ann Asch is a vice president at FEGS. She meets with clients who are looking for work, mostly older professionals who have been laid off, many from jobs in the Jewish communal world. For women who "haven't worked for a while, they have to account on their resumes for the years when they haven't worked."

And for these people, the basic mechanisms of looking for work have changed dramatically. They may lack up-to-date computer skills, familiarity with social networking tools, and even the experience of finding job listings online. These women struggle to use now-common sites like LinkedIn and Twitter, and need to learn how to build a profile for themselves.

Kordower says she helps coach older women in how to deal with ageism while searching for a job. "Some of these women have been in high level positions, and never had to do a job search. This is a new experience and in doing so, many face what they view as 'age discrimination'," she says. These workers "need to be comfortable being interviewed by individuals much younger than themselves, and to talk about their ability to learn new skills and the desire to work for many more years."

Fabianne Gershon was on Wall Street and had her own business before she was brought in by FEGS to run the Thypin Oltchick Institute, a project to help women start their own businesses. The program began near the end 2006, and Gershon says at that point the women who came to her mostly wanted to be entrepreneurs—in the arts, crafts, clothing design, accounting, counseling—so they could work out of their homes and have control over their schedules. These days, however, women are simply trying to make a living, adapting whatever skills they had before in ways that will be most profitable. ■

S.B.

Hoping for Work at Starbucks

Lenore Shapiro*, 49, San Francisco region, CA

What are you doing now?

I'd been doing non-profit management and fundraising for over 10 years. I had just gotten a new job doing development at a medical nonprofit. I'd been there only 11 months when they fired me because they said I hadn't raised enough money during that period. Of course no one had raised any money during that period, and they never adjusted their budget. I've actually been working [at a temporary job] for five months, and my contract ends next Friday, and then I'm back to pounding the pavement.

What happened when you first lost your job?

The first time I was fired with no warning. I mean literally. I came in on a Friday morning and I was gone an hour later. I was really so shell shocked. There's a lot out there when all of a sudden you're unemployed or low income, but no one tells you how to maneuver.

This time around I know how to apply for unemployment, but when you think how little I've worked in 10 months, I'm very aware that the unemployment I'll get is going to be minimal. So I've been applying for jobs nonstop. I'm looking into seasonal work at Starbucks or Target or whatever in my community and continuing to apply to other more full-time positions. What I realized is the salaries of two years ago, they don't exist any more. I will apply for anything remotely possible to be able to have food on the table while I look for something more substantial.

Any thoughts about new directions, if jobs in the non-profit sector don't turn up?

This past year-plus ... I unexpectedly had to have rotator cuff surgery and have had a very difficult recovery. I sort of resurrected an interest I've had for a long time in hypnotherapy. I would eventually like to become a clinical, medical hypnotherapist working with people with chronic pain. I actually just started my coursework.

Now that work has become more elusive, what's the meaning of work to you?

I think that at the moment, it is a means to an end, a means to keep a roof over our heads, pay the bills, but now I'm very clear what I want to do eventually, so I have a goal that I'll bring up when I'm depressed or if I'm in a seasonal job or a temporary job doing God knows what just to remind myself why I'm doing it. And also to show my daughter that this is what you do, "this is how you keep a family together."

*At the subject's request, her name has been changed.

REWORKING "RABBI"

Before the recession, five years of rabbinical school guaranteed a self-supporting vocation. Not anymore.

The man at the hub of rabbinic placement for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Lennard Thal, characterizes the current economic tough times for rabbis as the result of "the perfect storm." First, congregations cut back on rabbinic staff when congregants lost jobs and were unable to pay dues. Second, senior rabbis looked at their shrunken pensions and decided not to retire. Third, a restructuring of the congregational organization, the Union for Reform Judaism, left experienced rabbis looking for jobs. And, finally, there were the usual numbers of new rabbinic graduates entering the market; when they were admitted five years earlier to fully enrolled classes of 35 or 40 students, no one at Reform Judaism's seminary, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, could have predicted today's harsh economy. And while the number of Reform congregations in North America is growing—from approximately 850 to 910 over a decade—some temples are making do with fewer rabbis.

Of the 1,700 Reform rabbis in North America, 575 are women. Of Conservative Judaism's 1,648 rabbis, 273 are women. The number of Conservative congregations is now down to 650 from a high of 800. In teasing out the hard-time trends for both of these branches of Judaism, we see that the numbers are small and the information anecdotal. But there's the sense that women are disproportionally filling the lower ranks with jobs that may be cut.

A board member of the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN), the professional organization for more than 200 Reform women rabbis, emphasizes that Reform Judaism has yet to provide data comparing women and men rabbis. However, Rabbi Allison Bergman Vann says, anecdotal evidence indicates that women continue to make less money than men.

WRN Director Rabbi Jacqueline Ellenson says, "We know anecdotally that women patch together meaningful work—combining teaching in a Jewish middle school with working at a Jewish

'Why Do We All Have Jobs We Hate?'

Aliza Graber, 25, New York, NY

Give me a thumbnail of your employment history.

I graduated in 2007 [from Yeshiva University], and I went straight to graduate school, and graduated in 2009 with a master's in social work. And it took about six months to get a job. I was looking for all types of jobs, but specifically in the Jewish community. Unfortunately, I had the experience of being in school but I didn't have any formal working experience. And if I applied for a Jewish program job, they'd say "You're not qualified." But on the other hand if I applied for an administrative assistant job, they'd say, "You have a master's, you're too qualified." So they wouldn't want to hire me.

How did you survive those six months of looking?

I was living in [a studio in] New York, and thank God my parents were amazingly supportive. I had already taken out some student loans. But I ended up taking out a little bit more to cover my expenses. I think the hardest thing was groceries, because they're so expensive, and you can't not buy groceries. I found little jobs to do. Over the summer I worked at a camp. I also took substitute positions in day schools. But it was getting to the point where my parents were, like, if something doesn't happen soon, you'll have to move back home.

Do your friends talk about work and the recession?

Definitely. A good friend of mine was laid off in 2008. She didn't know what she was going to do—she was working in fashion. She eventually ended up taking a teacher position in a day school, in the nursery, which she hated. There's definitely a sense of uncertainty and fear and where is this going and where am I going to go and why do we all have jobs that we hate, and is that normal? A lot of friends were taking jobs that they didn't want, and we'd say maybe that's the norm, that everybody hates their jobs.

I'm an academic advisor at a college. Mostly I help students figure out registration. There's also a little career counseling. One woman came in and wanted to do human services, but she said there was no money in it so she was thinking about doing one of the sciences. That was so sad to me.

People who are college educated usually assume they'll be able to do something that connects with their skills and interests, but it sounds like for you and your friends, work is just work.

Yeah, that's what it really has become. If anything, I've sort of resigned myself to the situation now, and hope that in a couple months, or a year's time, I'll be able to find what I'm looking for.

home for the aged. And a woman will say, 'Don't fire me. I'm willing to work fewer hours to remain on staff'. Because of family responsibilities, women are often willing to trade on work to get flexibility."

Conservative Judaism unflinchingly revealed these same trends in the 2004 study "Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis: A Survey of Rabbis Ordained Since 1985" (the year the first Conservative woman rabbi was ordained). The study, by Steven M. Cohen and Judith Schor, found that women rabbis are paid less, are less likely to be pulpit rabbis, that those who are pulpit rabbis tend to be in the smallest congregations, and that 36 percent of all women rabbis are working part time. A possible factor: hardly any men in this study reported hurtful remarks about their age or gender early in their pulpit work, but 27 percent of women reported negative comments about their age and 58 percent heard negative remarks about their being female. A stunning 56 percent of women in congregations and 54 percent of women in non-congregational work believe their gender hurt their careers.

While the 2004 study has yet to be updated, Rabbi Ellen S. Wolintz-Fields, chairperson of the Women's Committee, of the Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservatives rabbis, says, "Often the assistant rabbi is a woman, and many of those jobs seem to be the ones being cut." Like her Reform counterparts, she says female rabbis are often in a weaker employment position because they choose to stitch together a number of part-time positions in lieu of full-time jobs, in order to accommodate raising children. Many of these part-time positions, however, "are no longer available, because institutions do not have the funds, and so they just cut programs, often run by my female colleagues working part time." Lennard Thal also sees that female rabbis "more often than men [are] the second wage earner," and hence are less able to relocate for job opportunities.

Compared with the much larger numbers of Reform and Conservative institutions, Reconstructionist Judaism's women and men rabbis seem to be weathering the storm with far more equilibrium; they have a total of 308 rabbis, with women and men equal in numbers and salary. This could well be because the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College welcomed both women and men from its start in 1973, and because it did not emphasize pulpit positions. Of the dozen new Reconstructionist rabbis each year, roughly half go into congregational positions and the rest tend to work with Hillels, on campus, and in education.

It may take a perfect storm to shake up the dominant rabbinic establishments' definition of rabbi. Defining success as something other than a pulpit job and making the alternatives financially viable would create a covenant worth honoring even in good times. ■

AMY STONE

BECAUSE OF FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES, WOMEN MAY TRADE WAGES FOR FLEXIBILITY. A WOMAN WILL SAY "DON'T FIRE ME. I'M WILLING TO WORK FEWER HOURS TO REMAIN ON STAFF."

at Lilith.org/blog/work

- Archived Lilith articles on work/life issues
- Frank talk from women working in Jewish organizations
- A chance to share *your* work experiences in the current economy

KAREN STOLPER

A VERY JEWISH POET

Yael Flusberg talks to Susan Schnur

Yael Flusberg is the 2010 winner of Poetica Magazine's annual chapbook competition. The prize is the publication of her newly released collection of poems, The Last of My Village *[www.poeticamagazine.com]. The poems—including "Vidui," "Sukkot," "Purim," "A Family Portrait," "Yom Kippur Blues"—are knowledgeably Jewish, and also worldly. Sifted through Flusberg's staggeringly tragic childhood, the poems become a monument to healing.*

Flusberg lives in the Ella Jo Baker Intentional Community Cooperative in Washington, D.C., and makes her living as an executive coach for non-profits, a yoga teacher, and a Reiki practitioner. She is 42.

SUSAN SCHNUR: What was it like to grow up in your family, Yael?

YAEL FLUSBERG: I knew, as a small child, that when human flesh burned it had a certain smell. People killed each other. Those were my bedtime stories. I thought that when we get to be a certain age, we get killed so we're not a burden on others. That's why I thought I had no grandparents. It wasn't until I was much older that I figured out that my mother's experience was a specific incident of genocide.

What was your parents' particular experience?

We were a totem pole of suffering. My father went deaf as a child, from scarlet fever, and he was bipolar. He grew up in Gdansk in a Hasidic family—his father was a rabbi and *mashgiach*, but my father was so pained by Hasidism. He was an orphan at 13 and left the Hasidic world at 25. He was hospitalized many times, psychiatric and physical. He was a skilled laborer, but he dreamed of being a physicist or a Jewish historian. His life was tragic, but he wasn't a Holocaust survivor. He died when I was 13.

And you're saying that your mother's experience was worse than this?

She was at Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz. When she was there the crematoria were at full capacity—10,000 to 14,000 a day. She killed herself when I was 15. She had made many, many attempts. The last four months of her life she was in a hospital and she used to beg me, "Will you kill me?" I come from a family where people die young and have led very harsh and tragic lives.

I can't imagine that there was room for a child in this family.

I hated that my parents couldn't do what other parents could do. They even died without leaving instructions about what to do with me, and there were horrible fights—foster care, legal guardians.... And I just wanted to keep living in the printers' union co-op in Queens. I grew up the only child of two very loving, very troubled human beings. They tried. They tried to live. My mother tried very hard to transform her own life, even in having me.

Was the printers' co-op the place where you fell in love with words?
My father was a printer for the New York Daily News. As a child, I'd see him do the dummy with metal plates, putting each letter down. He would make up fake ones for me when I visited. He'd do my name: "Yael Flusberg, colon, The Smartest Girl in the City!" He'd print it out on a piece of paper for me.

Did you know, as a child, that writing would be such a source of sustenance?
I went to an Orthodox yeshiva where I knew for certain that every single letter had a whole life.

Help me understand how writing works for you.
It clarifies my life's themes. I am always a bit thrown off that people think of my story as full of trauma. Certainly there was some of that, but I am also thankful for all the rich dark soil I've been given.

What have you grown in this soil? What are your life's themes?
Well, there's transformation, of course. Learning how to work and work with something until there's a shift. When I get the urge to write, it almost feels like I'm just vomiting it, then I have to let it sit for a long time. It has to be exteriorized. Once it's on paper, there's so much work to do. Revisions allow me to understand the thing I'm writing about, whether it's my mother's suicide or Tu B'Shvat.

Being a Jew is certainly a theme. Given my parents' cultural and spiritual traumas, it was such a negative identity. I had such a conflictive, pediatric view. There's no hiding with the name Yael Hanna Flusberg, named for both of my grandmothers. One died in Auschwitz, the other also had an early death, a mysterious one, in a sanitorium. She was married off as a child to her late aunt's husband. I've never even seen a photo of her.

Transforming my Judaism through poetry was an explicit task I gave myself.

Your poetry also has the recurrent them of "home."
Yes. What does it mean to be *at home*? How do we act in the world if we're *at home*? How will the world change when we feel *at home*? Feeling *at home*, we engage with one another, we listen, we ask. We refuse to be enemies. When I learned to be in my own presence, I came to home. I've shifted that notion of having everything taken away from you into a sense that we carry our most important gifts with us at all times, and that home can never be taken away, even if they kill you.

You poignantly dedicate your book: "To my dead—for all that you passed on, even after you passed over, for teaching me not to believe in death."
I have often felt the presence of my dead. If the TV turns on when I'm in the other room, I say, "If you're trying to give me a message, be a little clearer." There has often been energy around me, I've often felt protected and blessed. And the only way I can explain this is that my dead people are looking out for me—and I have so many dead people.

I'm exploring the difference between absence and loss. My parents' deaths were a loss, but not having grandparents, not having an ancestral land to go to—this is an absence, a vacuum. I felt born out of a void. After my parents died, I craved absence—that I hadn't been born, not that I wanted to kill myself. And

DISLOCATION

There's no one alive who remembers my nervous laughter
at my 10th birthday party when Mom repeated lines
like lyrics on a scratched disc, her first weekend home
from the hospital where they tried to shock her memories away.

I dislocated myself to rid New York from my speech,
forfeit the sing-song of my mother—this is a nice cake, no?
a foreign tongue in a familiar mouth. I distanced myself from
survivors accented by Galicia or goulash-breath who'd tell me

how lucky I was to be born, urge me to study hard or marry
well, learn to keep a good home, and I'd start to suffocate,
each of New York's eight million fast asleep on top of me.
I gave up being small among skyscrapers, walking for hours

surrounded, anonymous. I abandoned being an adult
in the city where I had been a child. They're all gone now,
the ones who'd tuck me in with stories about the scent
of burning flesh, grey smoke rising in factories

that I pictured like the pasteurization plant I could see
from my bedroom window. There's no reason
to return to the city where I thought I was born to lambs
strolling to the slaughterhouse and discovered I was the one
who couldn't run fast enough.

I went to an Orthodox yeshiva where I knew for certain that every single letter had a whole life.

TU B'SHVAT*

This full moon of nuts and fruits
comes closer to the Chinese New Year
than the vernal equinox, birthing wood from water.

I bless the Tree of Knowledge, of Life
for circulating nutrients that help
leaves bear fruits of the seven species.
I wrench nothing, slaughter only
dark energy built up over cold long nights
spent in bed without You.

Wheat, for bread is enough to beget friends
Barley, for a crown like Samuel or Sampson's
Figs of truth from the primordial tree
Pomegranate drippings like a scarlet letter
Olives of the salt-craving satisfaction
Dates, divinely sweet sex.

We'll partake of the grapevine—
the red of blood, the white of semen—
fertilizing Earth with our drunkenness.

**Tu B'shvat, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shvat, is also known as the New Year of the Trees. A celebratory dinner (seder) is held where only foods that don't need to be killed, yanked or pulled are enjoyed.*

What does it feel like to experience your book as a physical object? To have it in your hands, to see it on the shelf.
Most chapbooks are stapled because they are too thin to have a spine. But my book has a "perfect spine"—that's a technical term. On the spine it says, *The Last of My Village*. The title is for my Aunt Julie, the last of that generation to die, and she lived in Greenwich Village.

I'm proud to be a part of many people's villages. I live in a limited equity co-op with activists. We're from Lebanon, Colombia, Iran. Half of us are African-American. A diverse group, and we're all working class, which means keeping it real; we have to work. It's a small version of how I lived as a kid. A spine supports you. That's what I see on the book's spine.

I will write about my mother's suicide again when I'm 60, when I'm 70.... But a physical book feels like something is finished. It feels like a reconciliation. It's allowed to rest. It's like Shabbat. Resting, but also—what's going to be next?

I'm in a wonderful, wonderful place. ■

when I started writing, I was trying to fill absence. I didn't have normal stories around the kitchen table, stories about family. I had this huge void about what happened "Before" and "Over There," and without these stories, I didn't feel human. Even as a kid, I would say, "You shouldn't have had me. I wish I wasn't born. I wish I wasn't born."

Writing, for me, fills in the absences.

AT LILITH.ORG
Read "White Butterflies," Yael Flusberg's memoir of her mother's suicide. Lilith, Summer 1999. lilith.org/Winter2010.htm

WAITING OUTSIDE THE U.S. CAPITOL WHERE SHE LIES IN STATE, EVE OF ALL SOULS

The only tired I was, was tired of giving in.–Rosa Parks

after the first three hours
the temperature dropped to visible breath.
my fall coat no longer protected and my toes
went numb so i tried to transcend time
by thumbing a rose quartz bracelet
each bead proof of my will to persist,
my mother always said standing *appels**
for hours was a sentence of death
for the weak.

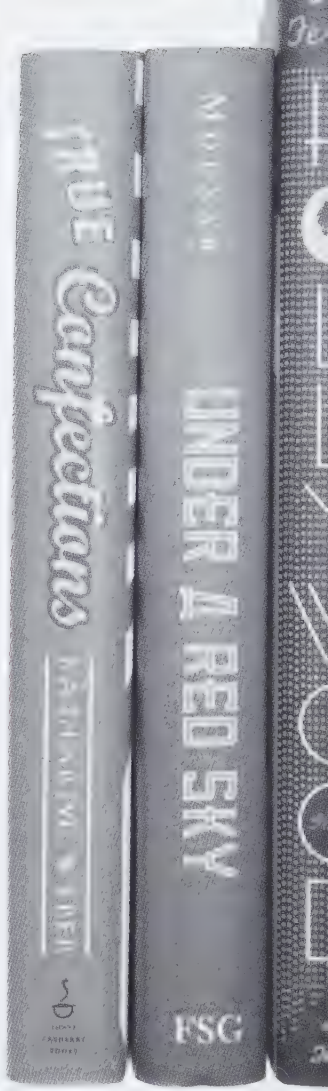
in the muddy field where thousands of souls made solitary
by the cold snaked around a makeshift fence,
i found a handful of warmth, a single ruby glove.

i practiced standing meditation following the ringing
in my ears to keep my mind from wondering why
i was on this line, not in my down-covered bed
when i'd see the coffin just as well in the newspaper
in the morning. each time i lifted my sole i knew
i was one step closer to the dome with 108 windows
like a rosary i could pray with my eyes.

it was dawn when i finally circulated once around
the ceremonial space then down to the crypt below
where i begged that her being where she was
would bless where she was laying—and all of us
who'll never have moments like hers on the bus
will still find something worth standing up for.

**In the Nazi concentration camps, inmates had to stand* appels*—a protracted roll call—twice a day regardless of weather or exhaustion. Some gave birth to babies buried on the spot. Many others dropped dead during the hours-long* appels *or were killed if they couldn't maintain an erect posture.*

REVIEWS



Alice in Candyland

Where fiction meets chocolate

In the interest of full disclosure I should admit that given a choice between a piece of chocolate and a plate of Brussels sprouts, I'll take the sprouts every time. I mention this only to prove that you do not have to love chocolate to enjoy ***True Confections*** by **Katherine Weber** (Shaye Areheart Books, $22.00). However, if you are a chocoholic, a term abhorred by Alice Tatnall Ziplinsky, the heroine of this novel, then Weber's descriptions—the taste, the scent, the silkiness on the tongue—are sure to send you looking for a chocolate fix. Warning: this book could be detrimental to your waistline.

Alice, the child of chilly WASPs whose only devotion to family is determining how directly they are descended from Benedict Arnold's wife, is destined for Middlebury College, until a self-inflicted disaster that involves a not-quite accidental house burning derails her academic career. On a whim she answers an ad for a job at Zip's candy factory. Sooner than chocolate can melt in your mouth, she's married to the son and heir, running the company, and recording the history of this sprawling Jewish family, which includes nineteen-twenties New York hit men, stolen candy recipes, and Adolf Eichmann's plan to resettle all of Europe's Jews in Madagascar.

But if the son Howdy, as Howard Ziplinsky is called, falls for Alice (or does he?), and the patriarch embraces her as a daughter, not all of the clan are so eager to welcome her into their midst. The more she does for the family business, the more faults Howdy's mother and sister find. But a lonely and undaunted Alice is determined to worm her way into the bosom of the Ziplinskys and their candy company. If the portrait of a large idiosyncratic squabbling Jewish family is somewhat stereotypical, her own WASP parents come off as even more typecast.

To say that Alice is not exactly a reliable narrator is putting it mildly, but she is a gimlet-eyed and witty observer. About her rebarbative sister-in-law, she writes, "shame on you…sitting there smugly in your $7 million log cabin…with your solar energy and your composting toilet, spouting your virtuous fair trade, sustainable, organic, free-range, antibiotic- and hormone-free, handwoven, sanctimonious crap."

True Confections occasionally bogs down in the details of making and marketing candy, and some of the subplots, like the antics of a supposed runaway slave from the cacao plantations of Cote d'Ivoire, feel like padding, but Alice's monologue—the book is in the form of an affidavit—never flags. And the less we trust Alice's account, the more we fall under her sway. She is, in fact, funniest about her own foibles, such as notarizing her forgeries of her father-in-law's signature, and putting her former husband's Patek Philippe watch in the Cuisinart.

Alice is not always loveable, but she is sure to make you laugh, and by the end of the novel you can't help cheering for this smart and feisty, if devious, woman who went after what she wanted, and got it.

ELLEN FELDMAN

Back to Bucharest

Memoir of a childhood in Communist Romania

Haya Leah Molner, author of ***Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania*** (Farrar Straus Giroux, $17.99) was almost eight before she learned she was Jewish. Growing up in Communist Romania in the 1950s, in the wake of the Holocaust that obliterated over half of Romania's Jewish population, Eva, as she was then called, the only child in a sea of adults, carefully pieced together the secrets of her family's past.

In this captivating memoir, Molner takes us back into the cramped apartment in Bucharest where young Eva lived with her parents, grandparents, aunt and uncles, basking in their love and attention and shielding herself from the constant bickering. Her father, a gifted photographer, had endured the *lager* concentration camps and Russian POW labor camps. Her mother's career as a ballet dancer came to an abrupt end, and a previous husband was killed in the war.

While her childhood was better than her parents' Holocaust horrors, daily life under communism was a fraught game of cat-and-mouse. The most terrifying threat was the Securitate, the secret service of communist Romania, whose dreaded knock in the middle of the night could mean only one thing. "Trust me," Eva's grandmother tells her, "you will never return. You will disappear from the face of the earth just

as if you had never been born." Once her family applied for passports to immigrate to Israel, and their Jewishness became public, life got even more difficult. All the adults in her family immediately lost their jobs, along with all the Jews in Romania who had applied for passports to Israel.

Throughout this limbo period of waiting to hear whether they would be granted permission to leave, Eva began to explore her newfound Judaism—and to make sense of her double life: "In school I become more indoctrinated in Communist ideology, while at home I'm a Jewish girl in hiding." Her grandfather, with whom she had an especially close relationship, gave her a mezuzah, not explaining what it is but merely telling her it contains the "truth." He also arranged for her to secretly meet with the rabbi to begin learning Hebrew. While Eva embraced her newfound Jewishness, it was puzzling to her. Afraid of being discovered as a Jew by the other kids at school, she asks, "What is a Jew, anyway? More than anything I wish the world would stop hating Jews because I'm still the same person I was before I knew I was Jewish."

Until the final pages, the reader is left wondering: What will become of the Zimmerman family? And what will become of Eva? And the reader roots for her family to leave the confines of Bucharest to start anew in freedom.

ABIGAIL PICKUS

She brought us *Giant*, *Showboat*, and *So Big*

A life of Edna Ferber

Hollywood successfully capitalized adaptations of Edna Ferber's novels—*Giant* the best-known of them—in its mid-twentieth-century studio phase. In ***Edna Ferber's Hollywood: American Fictions of Gender, Race, and History*** (University of Texas Press, $55), **J.E. Smyth** rescues Ferber from her present-day obscurity, describing the processes by which seven major "Ferber films" migrated from text to screen. Unlike fellow Jewish-American female writers Lillian Hellman and Anzia Yezierska, Ferber never wrote explicitly about Jews; however, according to Smyth, her outsider status as a working woman marked all her work and explains her focus on creating complex "mixed-race heroines who were active historical protagonists rather than passive, tragic mulattas or voiceless, vanishing Americans."

With 25 works turned into movies, Ferber reached wider audiences and commanded more respect from studio executives than most authors of her time, male or female. Indeed, Ferber's middlebrow literature enabled her success, drawing readers, beckoning Hollywood, and sometimes bringing her wealth. Ever the savvy businesswoman, Ferber negotiated contracts with filmmakers that guaranteed her copyright reversion, gave her percentages of profit, and, very important to her, ensured her name's presence in all credits. But for Smyth—and for Ferber—Hollywood's lure offered poisoned plenty. Filmmakers paid tremendous sums for her work, but their screenwriters rarely understood her feminist views or adequately translated her critical vision of America's past to the big screen. Of all of the film adaptations of her work, Ferber approved of only one: *Cimarron* (1931).

Ferber's interest in America's past—whether homesteading on the Midwestern prairie (*So Big*), performing on the Mississippi (*Showboat*), white settlers encountering Indians on the Oklahoma frontier (*Cimarron*), drilling for oil in Texas (*Giant*), or clamoring for power in the Alaskan wilderness (*Ice Palace*)—spanned the South and West. From the serialized and Pulitzer Prize-winning *So Big* in 1923 to her final western, *Ice Palace*, in 1958, Ferber developed multiracial female protagonists—such as the half-black and half-white Julie Laverne in *Showboat* and the "mixed-blood Eskimo and Scandinavian America" Christine Storm in *Ice Palace*—to challenge masculine-centered renderings of the American past. In *Cimarron*, for example, Yancey Cravat speaks of his newspaperwoman and pioneer wife, Sabra, by saying "'if [history] is ever told straight, you'll know it's the sunbonnet and not the sombrero that has settled this country.'"

As Smyth argues, Ferber's historical fiction challenged an array of standard limits, including the difference between high and low culture and standard twentieth-century views of race, gender, and power. Ferber narratives invested westerns and romance novels with history and criticism. Thus *Giant* relays the love story and family drama of Leslie and Bick Benedict against the backdrop of the discovery of oil in Texas. The well-researched story thus uses conventions of westerns and romances to entertain *and* criticize—to make readers encounter the very real matrix of wealth, power, and racism endemic to Texas' past and present. Yet Hollywood screenwriters and directors continually flattened Ferber's complex female characters and trivialized her concerns with white racial power. The film version of *Giant* (1956), for example, diminished the powerful perspective of the family matriarch and whitewashed the connections Ferber made between Jim Crow Texas and the poor treatment of Mexican American workers.

"I wish the world would stop having Jews because I'm still the same person I was before I knew I was Jewish."

Smyth excels at dissecting the differences between Ferber's American history and Hollywood's interpretation of Ferber's work, but the detail and density may overwhelm non-academic readers. In addition, while Smyth identifies Ferber as a Jew and suggests that her racial and gender politics stem from her heritage, she never explores the range or meaning of Ferber's Jewish identity. Nevertheless, for those interested in film and/or literary history, Smyth's work provides a tremendous and comprehensive resource.

RONIT Y. STAHL

Imperfect Homes

New works in translation by Israeli women writers

Real estate and its associated aspirations lie at the heart of both ***Eden***, by **Yael Hedaya**, and ***Every House Needs a Balcony***, by **Rina**

Frank. Hedaya provides a searing portrayal of a contemporary bourgeois bedroom community built alongside a decaying Israeli agricultural settlement. Frank documents a Romanian family's struggle to establish roots in Haifa shortly after the founding of the State. As competing pressures—economic, biological, political, romantic—threaten their closely guarded hopes and dreams, the characters in these works strain to turn their undesirable or problematic houses into homes.

Yael Hedaya is a name best known to American audiences because they see it running in the credits that follow HBO's compelling series "In Treatment"; she wrote many of the original scripts for B'Tipul, the show's Israeli precursor. But Hedaya's novels deserve our attention as well. The very title of *Eden* (Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2010) hints that the community portrayed in the novel will be anything but ideal; indeed, dystopia is perhaps not strong enough a word for the dysfunction and small tragedies that batter Eden's weary inhabitants. Hedaya adroitly portrays this moshav, founded in the 1950s by Hungarian and Polish immigrants, as a graying cluster of older residents gradually infiltrated by nouveau-riche Israelis and their designer houses. "Now Eden comprised three distinct classes: upper, lower, and elderly," comments Dafna, who grew up in Eden and mourns the place's transformation from "rich, rebellious wildness" into "a real estate amusement park." Something is clearly rotten in this supposed rural paradise: the houses leak from poor construction; thieves are sneaking in at night; the dogs are being poisoned. More worrisome, someone has molested a neighborhood child.

Not content merely to satirize the urban Israeli's search for a more bucolic existence, Hedaya plunges deep into the emotional lives of the families populating Eden. While Dafna and her husband Eli undergo years of exhausting infertility treatments, the separated couple Alona and Mark co-parent their two young children and somewhat tenuously live in different houses. Mark's teenaged daughter from a previous marriage, Roni, arrives from America and finds an outlet in her flings with older men, as well as in poetry. The voices of Reuven and Nechama, two of Eden's elderly residents, chime in occasionally as well. Hedaya wrings simple but profound emotional truths from the complexly intertwined lives of her characters. Here is Alona contemplating how being a parent has changed her: "Her life before the children had been one long sentence dotted with commas … a syntax of wanderings." Frustrated by work and feeling distanced from Eli, Dafna thinks, "How strange it was that not loving was so simple. Far simpler than loving." Jessica Cohen's fluid translation brilliantly conveys the bracing directness of Hedaya's prose.

The adults in Hedaya's anti-Eden often behave like children, while the children exhibit a jaded fatigue far beyond their years. Rina Frank also toggles between childhood and adulthood in her novel, *Every House Needs a Balcony* (HarperCollins, 2010). Frank divides the book into two alternating narratives: the first presents first-person, seemingly autobiographical reminiscences told by a girl named Rina (like the book's author), while the other describes the relationship between an Israeli woman only known as "she" and a Spaniard called "the man." By far the more convincing, the first voice tells of immigrant living conditions, identity issues, and the city of Haifa. Rina's parents, Moscu and Bianca, struggle to raise their two daughters in the Wadi Salib neighborhood of Haifa; they walk "with a heaviness typical of people who are no longer expecting anything." As with Hedaya's novel, here too, real estate is paramount: a family's house serves as a metaphor for their overall wellbeing, as well as an indicator of broader social dynamics. Rina emphasizes the role that balconies played for the poor residents of Wadi Salib, where "all the buildings had balconies, one balcony facing the other, with no difference between the outside and the inside… . Your entire life was laid out there on the balcony, illustrated in the piles of bedclothes hung out daily on the banister for airing… . For us, the balcony was our television, and what we saw was real life, played out with authentic actors in real time." The family's far-reaching view from the balcony to the water and up the coastline hints at their paradoxical relationship to their adopted homeland. They are establishing roots here, yet always glancing outwards to a less restrictive existence.

The balcony is also the place where Yosefa (nicknamed Sefi), Rina's wise and authoritative older sister, claims to have had a vision of God and angels. Through her many "commandments," including "don't roll your R's, so as not to emphasize that you are Romanian," Yosefa strives to acculturate and help her sister blend in as well. Indeed, the relationship between the two sisters, "playing, inventing stories, and jabbering our childhood gibber," set against the backdrop of the new Israeli state, feels like the true heart of this book. Unfortunately, the intervening chapters depicting "the man" and "she"—whom we soon understand to be Rina, all grown up and negotiating a stormy romantic relationship—interrupt this touching narrative. As the book draws to a close, Rina demands and gets the new apartment she had been craving; she presides over a month of renovations, and marvels at the difference made by knocking down walls and retiling. Not surprisingly, the new and improved space does not translate into happiness.

Frank's novel evokes the Jewish state in its infancy, while Hedaya portrays the Israel of today. In both of these works, the walls of domestic space contain the intimacies and tragedies of family life. Though the country's political and military situation is never far from their focus, the authors suggest that deep distrust of the other could be what threatens the foundations of home, and homeland, most of all.

HANNAH PRESSMAN

On the Seventh Day God Ate Tofu

Recipes for the Day of Rest

I almost always get the same reaction when I say that I became a vegetarian seven months ago. Everyone wants to know: Does this mean that I won't cook

Make Me a Comic:

Graphic Depictions of Jewish Women

Two recently released graphic novels detail the lives of independent Jewish women: **Greg Rucka**'s ***Batwoman Elegy*** (DC Comics $24.99) is a slick and powerful superhero story where a woman takes command; **Vanessa Davis**'s ***Make Me a Woman*** (Drawn and Quarterly, $24.95) is an irreverently told slice-of-life autobiography.

This is nothing new. The subject of Judaism in graphic novels—a genre once dismissed as "just comic books" and now a major presence in the publishing world—has been as divergent as our history in every other medium. There are dramatic graphic novels like Art Spiegleman's classic, Maus, a retelling of the Holocaust with the Jews as mice at the grip of feline Nazis. And there are lighthearted graphic novels like Joann Sfar's *The Rabbi's Cat*, with its impish talking cat who wants to have a bar mitzvah.

Political commentator Rachel Maddow writes in her foreword to Batwoman Elegy, "For all the brilliant literary allusion, mystery, and trademark Rucka attention to detail, what you won't be able to shake when you're done here is that damn compelling lead character" when talking about Jewish lesbian superhero Kate Kane, a.k.a. Batwoman. In Rucka's story, she came on the Gotham scene the year Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman backed off.

While Kate shows sensitivity in her relationships, and pain when faced with homophobia, she is tough. After a childhood as a military brat, she joined the army—only to be caught with a female lover and forced to leave. The graphic novel thus delves into the realm of our present-day political implications of Don't Ask Don't Tell.

Refusing to let heartbreak hold her back when her girlfriend leaves her, the masked superhero continues to fight wrongs and uncover gruesome details from her deadly past. Judaism plays a background role in this graphic novel. While we see a menorah and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life in her house, and the High Holy Days are once mentioned, the draw here may be more about how the phrase "lesbian Jewish superhero" is going to catch people's attention.

All this would cause *Make Me a Woman* to feel like a book in a completely different genre. Davis has written an autobiographical graphic novel in vignettes which detail her life from childhood to adulthood. Some of these run several pages, while others are less than a page. Her people sometimes look like irreverent doodles from an artist's sketchbook. Davis describes everything from going to fat camp as a kid (which she enjoyed) to her relationships as a grownup (which she doesn't always enjoy). In this book, Judaism plays an integral role. The book opens with our hero attending a bat mitzvah and describes her own ceremony, as well as her time in Jewish day school: "Having grown up almost exclusively around Jews, pretty much every weekend in 1990 I spent at a bar mitzvah." Eventually she ruminates, "I think a lifetime of High Holy Days and Jewish values have impressed upon me the importance of self-reflection! And I feel lucky to have been brought up in this broad-minded Judaism, that lets me belong, even when I pull away."

The two graphic novels tell strikingly different stories about Jewish women. We might say that Batwoman is the ideal: the "perfect" woman who can fight wrong and never lets herself get beaten. In contrast, Vanessa Davis's autobiographical character is the real woman, with foibles and flaws we recognize as human. *Batwoman* takes us into a whole new world; *Make Me a Woman* makes our own world relatable through art.

DANICA DAVIDSON

for them anymore? Of course, I haven't stopped cooking, in part thanks to ***The Vegetarian Shabbat Cookbook*** by **Roberta Kalechofsky & Roberta Schiff** (Micah Publications, Inc. $26).

Integrating the values of vegetarianism and Judaism, this new book is a thorough and helpful resource for both the beginner and the more experienced. As a relatively recent vegetarian, I appreciated the extensive background information on the merits and preparation of a variety of foods such as tempeh, seitan, beans and vegetables. Though this book is technically a vegan cookbook, each recipe gives a sense that it belongs in a wholesome meal at a warm Shabbat table. Simplicity of preparation and an appreciation of what ingredients work well together creates dishes that will impress and satisfy guests without killing the chef in the process, and good-tasting food is one of the best ways to explain to others why being a vegetarian does not mean sacrifice.

The book is organized by course and prefaced by chapters on the basics of food preparation and Shabbat observance. Every chapter begins with a short introduction to that course, its merits and possibilities as well as some information

about common ingredients. There are no pictures of the dishes, though there are some nice Shabbat-themed illustrations on some pages. While all of the recipes I tried came out well, I particularly enjoyed the Chickpea and Pasta Salad with Cherry Tomatoes, Basil and Bread Crumbs. The White Bean Stew With Caramelized Onions was also delicious and relatively simple to prepare.

I was surprised that Kalechofsky and Schiff weave into their pages a range of perspectives on Shabbat yet none on the issue of vegetarianism. It's as though the book's vegetarian recipes are an extension of the values of Judaism and therefore don't require additional history and explication. As someone who originally became a vegetarian because of the environmental and ethical implications of the modern meat production industry, I believe that this concern for living more ethically is an extension of my Judaism. The more I learn about both the values of vegetarianism and of Judaism, the more I see them as harmonious. Both require a consciousness of choice, a purposefulness of action, and an effort to improve ourselves and the world around us.

Having grown up in a Jewish but non-observant home, I appreciated the chapter on Shabbat's origins and customs as well as the lovely meditations on the joy of Shabbat interspersed throughout the book. Commentary on the Talmud and tidbits about how Shabbat is observed around the world, these snippets contribute to the sense that Shabbat is something special, that these meals will elevate your table, and that what really matters is the time you spend reflecting and resting with family and friends.

MARA FRIEDMAN

The Compound of the Scribes

Answering letters from the concentration camps

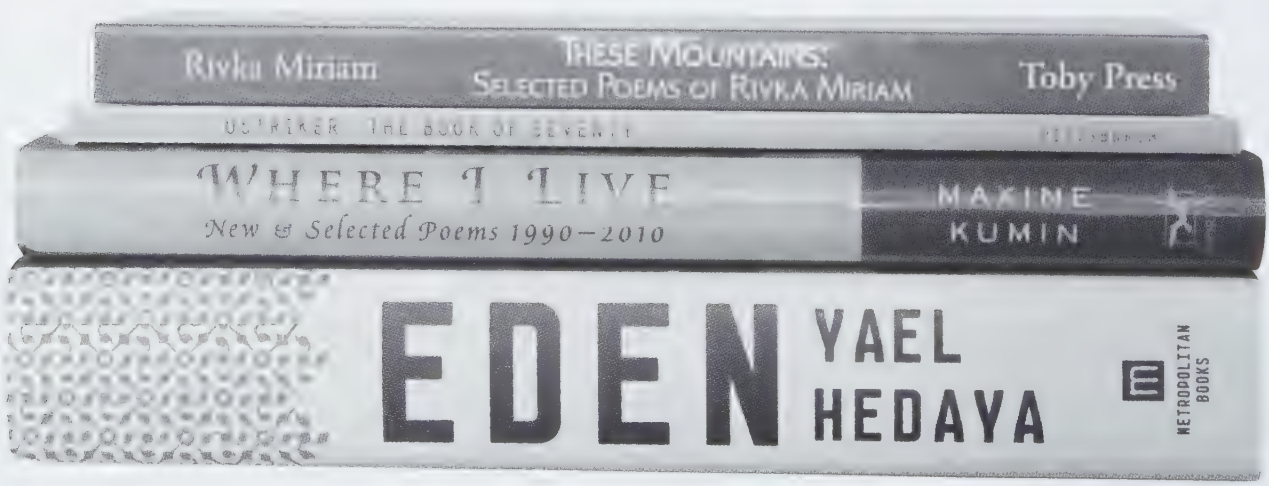
Heidegger's Glasses by **Thaisa Frank** (Phoenix Books, $22.95/$28.95 Canadian) takes as its protagonist a woman capable of transforming herself. But unlike Demeter or Arachne, she does so by shifting identity rather than by physical alteration. She operates in a world, a time that has lost its moral compass. While others adhere to strict ideological codes, at times supported by nothing more than superstition, Elie Schacten has the capacity to move snakelike across boundaries and borders closed to most.

. Thaisa Frank invites us into her novel through the route of the philosopher's cognitive disorientation—a tree "a confusion of shapes," a "blood-spattered window a floating oblong," a "starling…darkness in motion." We sense that the world as we know it will be altered and may not be resurrected whole again. It is a warning. Though for a moment there is restoration: "eventually the ticking belonged to the clock again." A capsule summary of the entire work.

The novel is set against the backdrop of the decline of the Third Reich. Hidden in a forest enclave is the strange Compound of the Scribes. Made of a converted mineshaft, the sole purpose of its inhabitants is to answer letters written by those about to be executed, letters that will never be delivered.

George Steiner tells us in *No Passion Spent*, that for the Jewish people the "text was the instrument of exilic survival; that survival came within a breath of annihilation." We know of the significant teaching and learning, art and music, preservation of texts, that went on in the ghettos while thousands were rounded up and murdered. In this Compound of the Scribes, while ghostly souls flee into the forests, and others are routinely killed, an absurd echo of the living—Heidegger's *being* weirdly distorted and strangely illuminated in this habitation—can be heard. What is the purpose of the Scribes? To answer letters from the dead—a task presented by the clairvoyant Erik Hanussen in the form of a globe oozing letters that signify the unanswered letters of the dead. No need to deliver the letters, only to write them. The supposition? By answering the letters and sealing the cracks, the Third Reich can claim absolute power.

And what is the nature of this living space? A tunnel 10 meters deep



that includes an artificial sun and moon, cobblestone streets replete with false trees. To wit, a life outside of life that at any moment can give way. As with so many who were required to hide in holes in the ground, or deep in forests in winter, or behind walls and, if they were lucky enough, to enter the world of the living once more and to pretend for the rest of their lives that they could live like normal human beings. And the bits and pieces, the remnants of what they have lived through and died through turn up as strange objects, bits of worn pages, that whisper to the generations that follow who could not possibly imagine from what world such scraps had arisen.

And what has Heidegger's glasses to do with all of this? Is it to teach us that we must see through the lens of one who brought us the great work of thought of his century and at the same time aligned himself with the darkest imagining made manifest?

And the figure who could establish various identities to save the lives of others: what has become of her? She has vanished back into the world. This is a complex tale, to be consumed on many levels, as it has been beautifully constructed.

MYRA SKLAREW

Poetry Roundup

The twelfth book of poems from **Alicia Ostriker**, ***The Book of Seventy*** (University of Pittsburgh Press, $14.95), written as Ostriker enters her seventieth year, showcases the wisdom she has gained as both a poet and a person: "I have less / interfering with my gaze now / what I see I see clearly." She has arrived in her body and mind, and the poems feel like offerings to those of us journeying to reach this place. Ostriker celebrates decades of a marriage that only gets better with age. In "The Married Man" she writes: "He kissed and kissed me like an animal / I kissed and kissed him like the other half / of that animal." In the middle sections, Ostriker speaks through the voices of Persephone, Artemis, and Lord Krishna, among others. These poems ruminate about childhood, motherhood, spirituality, and culture. Ostriker's gift is that she can be both fiercely feminist and tender in the same breath. She ends the book with poems about the state of the world, tackling war and torture. In "Listening to Public Radio" Ostriker compares today's world to the world when fascism reigned, explaining: "but nobody could stop it / or not enough people wished to stop it / so nature took its course / the book of Job came true / the millions and the millions disappeared." Although Ostriker expresses a sense of foreboding about the world and its future, she seizes moments to celebrate life, ending the book with images of spring: "the birch trees close their eyes in the rain / and robins drink their bliss."

Maxine Kumin's latest collection, ***Where I Live: New and Selected Poems 1990–2010*** (W.W. Norton and Company, $29.95), is a compilation of poems from the past twenty years, along with 20 new ones. Kumin, winner of a Pulitzer Prize and former Poet Laureate of the United States, looks with awe upon the world. The most stunning poems in the collection take place on the farm in New Hampshire where she has lived with her husband, raising animals and caring for the land. Her tenderness for the animals is felt throughout the poems. In "Praise Be," Kumin is midwife at a horse's birth: "I tear the caul, look into eyes / as innocent, as skittery / as minnows." Throughout the book are explorations of her past. Most notable are the poems to Kumin's dear friend, the poet Anne Sexton, who committed suicide in 1974, at the height of their friendship. The loss is still potent today, as Kumin, now 80, reflects in "October, Yellowstone Park": "My world that threatened / to stop the day you stopped, faltered / and then resumed, unutterably altered." In "Mulching," Kumin characterizes herself as "a helpless citizen of a country / I used to love." But she finds solace in nature again, asking the earth to "take [her] unquiet spirit, / bury it deep, make compost of it." Kumin has left her mark on the earth in poems that quietly startle, and resonate with love.

These Mountains: Selected Poems of Rivka Miriam (The Toby Press, $14.95) offers English readers a taste of this Israeli poet's strange and intriguing work. Miriam published her first book of poems at 14, and has since written 12 others. The daughter of Holocaust survivors, her childhood was marked by this tragedy, but also by the cadre of artists she was constantly surrounded by, and her deep connection to Jewish mysticism. Expertly translated by Linda Stern Zisquit, Miriam's poems are quick snapshots of the poet's unconscious: simple, dreamy, innocent yet lustful, always informed by Miriam's fascinating childhood and feverish spirituality. She speaks directly to God in several of the poems, her connection intimate and sensual: "He left his imprinted fingers / on the mist of my window / the scent of his breath / remained in my room" (from "Still"). The subject of motherhood comes up often, through the point-of-views of Rachel, Leah, Lot's wife—and the poet's own experience of giving birth to her daughter. Perhaps the most moving poems in the book are about Miriam's own mother suffering with dementia:

> Who is your mother? my mother asked me
> and I, slowly turning towards her
> pointed at her with a small finger
> and whispering, answered: you.

These poems are among her most honest and direct, writing from the raw experience of watching her mother deteriorate. They leave the reader wondering

And the figure who could establish various identities to save the lives of others: what has become of her?

where Miriam's poems will head next, and eagerly awaiting them.

WENDY WISNER

After a Driven Leaf

A feminist Hosea

Sixty years after the untimely death of **Milton Steinberg**, scholars have collaborated to publish an incomplete and previously unknown novel by the legendary author of *As a Driven Leaf* (1939). The newly released novel, ***The Prophet's Wife*** (Behrman House, $24.95), is the story of Hosea and his wayward wife Gomer, a tale of love and betrayal that provides a compelling backdrop to one of the most unsettling biblical texts, with a surprising feminist twist.

At the beginning of the book of Hosea, God instructs the prophet to take a "wife of harlotry" and father "children of harlotry" to symbolize the troubled relationship between God and the People of Israel. Hosea accordingly marries Gomer bat Diblayim and bestows upon the children that are born to them names that reflect God's harsh response to Israel's unpardonable sins. This biblical account served as Steinberg's inspiration, but most of the people and events that feature in the novel are products of the author's own imagination. The masterful storytelling and gripping portraiture that made Steinberg's first novel one of the most influential Jewish books of the twentieth century are again on full display.

As the title indicates, the narrative centers on the relationship between Hosea and his wife, but it is really about the making of a prophet, a story in which prophecy is defined as the insight of a sensitive and discerning individual into his own circumstances and experiences. Set in the northern kingdom of Israel during the eighth-century BCE reign of King Jeroboam, the narrative follows Hosea from boyhood to middle age and from the wonder of new love and the convictions of untested faith to a calling that is born of disloyalty, self-doubt, and despair.

The greatest license Steinberg took with the biblical text was to invert the storyline: according to the Bible, Hosea is commanded to marry a harlot, but in the novel, he freely loves and weds the chaste if willful Gomer and only later discovers her transgressions and infidelities. The inversion is a brilliant twist that offers insight into an age-old conundrum: why does God return to the people after their repeated betrayals? The intense, complicated, and very human dynamic between Steinberg's Hosea and Gomer adds force to the biblical metaphor and suggests that God and Israel too are bound to one another in spite of it all.

Despite the highly conventional use of gender in the prophecies of Hosea, Steinberg managed to write a story with distinctly modern and even feminist overtones. To begin with, he gave Gomer the voice and the depth of personality that she lacks entirely in the biblical text, where she is more of a concept than a character. And he depicted prostitution as a societal failing rather than a moral lapse, the product of women's particular vulnerability to poverty and misfortune. Strikingly, it is these touches that render Steinberg's interpretation of the biblical narrative most convincing.

In the Bible, Hosea's prophesy indicates that God will ultimately forgive the sins of Israel and end their estrangement. But Steinberg left his novel unfinished, and it is hard to know whether he intended for the fictional Hosea and Gomer to reunite. The publishers, who discovered the typewritten manuscript in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society, considered hiring another author to complete the story, but ultimately decided to leave Steinberg's work as he did. The abrupt conclusion may frustrate some readers, but it is also an invitation to craft our own endings, partnering with the author in making modern meaning of an ancient text.

RACHEL FURST

From Polish Shtetl to Capetown

A new setting for a familiar family saga

Maja Kriel, an author from South Africa, has been around the block and around the world. Or at least that is the impression she gives in her first novel, ***Rings in a Tree*** (Kwela Books, $23.95), in which her characters circumnavigate the globe. This peripatetic family saga begins in the tiny village of Sharabaka, Poland, where Chava and her best friend Wlad share the joys of the countryside:

> *They eat sour black bread with cheese and cucumbers and drink sweet water from the stream, feeding the crabs with crumbs to watch them scuttle sideways and nibble with trembling mandibles... They have just found a glory hole of colored stones, emeralds and rubies and the smoothest granite with shards of gold. A queen's dowry, a pirate's ransom, but Chava only wants the plain white stone shaped into a perfect heart.*

Jews are not safe in Sharabaka, though, and soon Chava, her parents and sister Gittel leave for the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw; an older sister, Faiga, has run off to join a convent and remains there, never to communicate with them again.

In Warsaw, Chava is drawn to a young man who shares the family's Sabbath dinners. The two marry and the locale abruptly changes again, this time to London, where Chava—now known as Eva and pregnant for a second time—must endure the lascivious groping of her boss while she labors making buttonholes in a sweatshop. Her husband leaves for Capetown, in search of work. She soon follows, only to discover that he has fallen sick and died before her arrival.

In the South African town of Kimberley, Eva marries Elias, a plump widower with daughters of his own, and the story shifts in focus again, this time to Eva's son Max, as we watch the family in Johannesburg, New York, and back in Johannesburg. Max marries Hannah, a Russian immigrant with a deformed sister, and soon their daughter Amy dominates the story.

Kriel's Jewish family saga lacks a discernible center. But its rich, densely studded prose, and its almost painful accretion of incident and details, render it an unusual and compelling read.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH

Our Reviewers

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WENDY WISNER is the author a book of poems, *Epicenter*. Her poems have appeared in The Spoon River Review, The Bellevue Literary Review, Rhino, and elsewhere.

Adrienne Cooper's new CD promises to be the Jewish music gem of the year. Set as jazz ballads, pop, and multi-layered arrangements à la Spike Jones, backed by a brilliant big band with Frank London, Marilyn Lerner and Michael Winograd, the gorgeous vocals range from deeply intimate to politically stirring, from sound collage to wild ballads from Jewish women's history, in Yiddish and English, making Yiddish finally a world music.

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HAPPENING

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Living the Legacy

A curriculum for grades 8–12 focuses on Jews in the Civil Rights Movement and includes women such as Freedom Rider Judy Frieze Wright (above) and a lesson on the influence of feminism on civil rights activism. Leah Berkenwald of the Jewish Women's Archive says it "wrestles with the complexities of Jewish social justice activism—issues of power, privilege." *JWA.org*

Support Women of the Wall

A prayer for the new moon/new Hebrew month, developed by Virginia Avniel Spatz, has inspired additional prayers or *kavanot* (meditations) in support of the women's struggle for prayer space at Jerusalem's Western Wall. Participate in a website conversation, where you can also sign a petition voicing your support for women's rights at this holy site. For $100, sponsor a kiddush after the group's monthly services in Jerusalem. *womenofthewall.org.il*

Adoption and Jewish Women

Lilith's first-hand explorations of alternative family formation in the wake of infertility, memoirs of adoptees, rarely heard narratives of those pregnant, unmarried Jewish women who, in the pre-Roe v. Wade years, decided to relinquish their newborns for adoption, are among powerful pieces in a curated online collection at Lilith.org, made possible with the support of the Sunny and Abe Rosenberg Foundation. "Sarah's Laugh: How Infertile Women Deal," by Karen Propp; "King Solomon's Knife: A Feminist Midrash about Adoption," by Diane Cole; fiction by Erika Dreifus about a social worker visiting a woman who wants to adopt, and heartfelt passionate discussions of population panic, wanting babies, pro-natalism in Israel, Jewish moms and Chinese daughters, and Jewish women's eggs in the IVF marketplace are available for free download in this expanding collection. There's also a place to share your stories on this subject. *Lilith.org/adoption.htm*

Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education

is the new name and the University of Southern California is the new home of the former Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation founded by Steven Spielberg. Holding nearly 52,000 video testimonies from survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust in 32 languages, representing 56 countries, it is the largest archive of its kind in the world. A broadened mission is to overcome intolerance and bigotry—and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies. Find out about its many programs for educators at *usc.edu/vhi.*

Guy Things?

Have your friends' back no matter what? Know how to sew on a button? Pay for a date? Ask for directions? Tell others how you feel about them? Think about sex a lot? Always want to win? Babysit? Save the day? Be a rabbi? Say I'm sorry? Do your own laundry? Show affection? Talk to someone while standing at a urinal? Make the first move? Lead the Passover seder? Be the family provider? Play sports/ be a nurse/ blow a shofar/ suffer silently? Be counted in a minyan? Back down from a fight? These triggers come from a discussion guide "Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action." Prompted by Jewish boys dropping out of Jewish life in great numbers after bar mitzvah, the report, distilled from three years of research and 40 focus groups with Jewish boys, found that putting boys' developing masculinity—their "journey to manhood"—at the center of male-focused Jewish programming, with a well-trained male facilitator, will keep more boys engaged in Jewish life. *movingtraditions.org*

A Women-Only Mission to Israel

Billed as "a girls' week out to experience Israel through laughter and tears"—this annual trip offered by Jewish National Fund (JNF), this year February 27 to March 6, 2011, centers on meeting Israeli women soldiers, pioneers, musicians, designers, chefs, businesswomen, Holocaust survivors, and "just ordinary women." 877-JNF-TOUR.

Jewcy.com

The website which describes itself as "the online platform for the ideas that matter to young Jews today" has been reborn as a nonprofit project of JDub, the record label that launched the careers of Matisyahu and Balkan Beat Box. Jewcy now has a national Jewish events calendar, and its popular features like "Ira Glass Infatuation/This American Life Review" and "Fifty First JDates" will remain, bolstered by new columns including "Notes From a Single Mom," "Freudian Sex Advice" and "Controlling the Media 101." Users can submit their own articles and images for publication. *Jewcy.com*

Jewish Laws of Shabbat: Cooking

Offering the opportunity for deaf and hearing-impaired students to participate in a mainstream online classroom setting for Torah studies, via instruction in American Sign Language, this class—which will explore cooking before Shabbat, reheating, and all aspects of food preparation on Shabbat—consists of a video of the teacher talking, along with a signer who signs the entire course. Organizers say this is the first of more courses to be designed for students with special needs by *WebYeshiva.org*

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF)

Founded in 1997, following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, this fund aims to close the gap between activists' needs and the resources available to them, helping especially in areas experiencing armed conflict, escalating violence, political volatility or extreme repression. Its strategic grantmaking relies on in-depth research and understanding the contextual situation in which each grant is made, gained through engagement in various human and women's rights networks. It has an international board, and its website takes applications for grants in more than a dozen languages. *urgentactionfund.org*

A Secular Yeshiva in Tel Aviv

Established in 1996 by kibbutz movement members in the wake of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, BINA, the Center for Jewish Identity and Hebrew Culture and their secular yeshiva were created to help bridge the differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews in Israel, and address the problems secular Israelis have with traditional Judaism. Its location, in inner-city south Tel Aviv, allow students to study Bible, Talmud, Israeli literature and Zionist history while also being engaged in BINA *BaShkhuna* (BINA in the neighborhood), serving their local community as volunteers. In addition to the yeshiva, BINA runs seminars in public schools and offers a summer seminar for rabbis, educators, rabbinical students, community leaders and social activists. *bina.org.il*

Suburban Jewish Life over the Last 50 Years

The Jewish Museum of Maryland is collecting photographs of suburban life—building houses, moving in, neighborhood life, and suburban synagogue events—for a new exhibition, "In Our Time." They also welcome photographs of Jewish celebrations, interfaith families, "green" events, women taking on new roles in holiday activities. Contact Jennifer Vess or Rachel Kassman (*jvess@jewishmuseummd.org; rkassman@jewishmuseummd.org*).

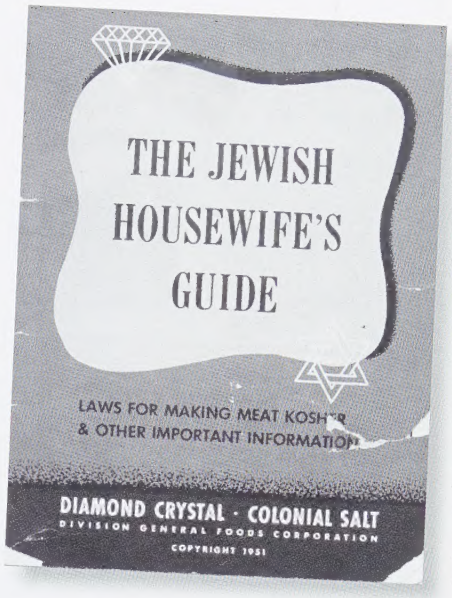
Do You Have a Mikveh Story?

Literary memoirs and fiction in Hebrew or English about women's experiences of the mikveh are invited for a bilingual anthology, *Tvilot*. Send your 4-10 page submission to Jerusalem-based editor *Michal.Wosner@gmail.com*.

Jewish Summer Camp?

Jewish sleepaway camp can be transformative in the life of a child and help create adults who value being Jewish. Find out about financial incentives for first time campers at *onehappycamper.org*.

Clockwise from top left: Hannah Senesh and friend, Palestine. 1940; Hannah Senesh, Budapest, Hungary, c. 1936; Last meeting of Hannah Senesh and her brother Gyuri (Giora), Tel Aviv, Palestine, on February 2, 1944.


THE JEWISH HOUSEWIFE'S GUIDE
LAWS FOR MAKING MEAT KOSHER & OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION
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From Housewife's Guide to a Woman's Tallit...

The National Museum of American Jewish History just reopened in a new building near the Liberty Bell, overlooking Independence Mall in Philadelphia. Its theme is freedom and what its embrace has meant to America's Jews over the last 200 plus years. The floor dedicated to "Choices and Challenges of Freedom, 1945–Today" includes the 60s counterculture, civil rights, feminism and political protest. *nmajh.org*

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, check out WHAT'S NEW at *Lilith.org*, and sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

Fire in My Heart: The Story of Hannah Senesh.

This first-ever major exhibition tells how the Budapest-born poet, diarist, and author of the hymn "Eli, Eli" discovered her love for the Land of Israel, volunteered for a mission to rescue downed Allied fliers and Jews by parachuting into Nazi-occupied Hungary, and became an enduring symbol of courage. The exhibition recounts Senesh's home life, education, and religious beliefs as part of a bourgeois Jewish family and shows how her priorities changed after 1937 upon encountering anti-Semitism. Hannah's failed rescue mission, imprisonment, trial and execution at age 23, are narrated through her acquaintances, family, and friends. This exhibit runs until August 7, 2011 at The Museum of the Jewish Heritage in New York City. *mjhnyc.org*

BEFORE MARRYING AGAIN...

by JORDANA HORN

a ceremony to differentiate my past life from my new marriage

IT'S FOUR DAYS BEFORE I get married, and here I am, I'm ringing the doorbell to the mikveh. As I wait for the woman to open the door, I think: what am I doing here?

I've never been to the mikveh before—not even the first time I got married, 10 years ago. I don't remember why, but the last time around, it didn't even occur to me.

A few days before my mikveh-doorbell-ringing, I'd sat in the kitchen, my head in my hands, going over my perilously long to-do list. It was a week before the wedding. I had a month's worth of things to do.

"So skip the mikveh!" my fiancé said supportively.

"I did last time," I said. "And look what happened then."

He pointed out that his first wife had gone to the mikveh, and that marriage had ended in divorce as well.

"The mikveh thing isn't a guarantee of marital success," he said. "I'm just saying, if it's too much stress to fit it in, don't do it."

But here I am.

It's not superstition that has brought me here, my comment notwithstanding. Nor is it a sudden reverence for the Jewish laws of purity. To a certain extent, it's a fiction, the skeptic in me says; right? After all, I'll never be able to purify myself completely. The proof of that is running around the kindergarten and first grade of the local elementary school.

In other words, I have two beautiful boys from my first marriage. They are a blessing. But I also have all the memories of what went so horribly wrong in that marriage. I have the emotional scars of fear, mistrust and self-doubt. And I find they're hard to hide or to ignore.

Finally, the woman comes to the door and lets me in. She seems much younger than I am, head wrapped in a scarf. She smiles, and takes me down the hall to a small bathroom. She explains everything that I am to do. First, take a long bath. Exfoliate. Scrub off all the nail polish, the dead skin, the scabs. Comb the knots from my hair. Another long list.

"It'll take at least an hour," she says.

"But I'm short," I respond. "There's not that much of me."

She laughs. "Trust me," she says. "It takes longer than you'd expect."

Great, I think, as she leaves and I fill the tub. I undress and sink into the hot water.

Forty-five minutes later, and I find myself still at work. I've gotten the wedged-in dirt under my nails, filed off the calluses on my feet, Q-tipped both ears. But unbelievably, despite the not-so-vast 5'2" expanse of myself, there's still so much more to do.

Stupid red toenail polish, I think, as I scrub away with a cotton ball and nail polish remover, doing the work that is normally done for me at the pedicure place.

I'm tempted to give up and walk out. I don't have time for this. But I stay and keep working. Out, damn spot!

WHY AM I HERE? The real reason is that this is the closest thing I can find to a ceremony that will separate my past life from the one I'm going to start in a few days.

The fact is, my married past makes me feel like less of a bride now. In certain ways, of course, this is not such a bad thing. This time around, I don't care one bit about the flowers on the tables, or what color dresses my sisters and sisters-in-law wear. All I care about is the man who will be waiting for me under the *chuppah*—the *beshert* I never thought existed.

But brides normally have bachelorette parties, not Back to School Night. I'm not a virgin in any sense of the word. In fact, I'm the head kindergarten class mom. I am older. I hope I am wiser. I have been in dark places to which I will never return. By getting married for a second time, though, I am making a conscious decision, allowing love to trump fear, and the future to trump the past. The mikveh is my own private recognition of the liminal moment.

Simchat Torah will be a few days before my wedding. On Simchat Torah, the end of something runs into the beginning of something else. Things end and begin. Joy and sadness can intermingle. But happiness will triumph, if we let it.

An hour and 15 minutes after I've arrived, I'm naked in the mikveh. I submerge myself completely three times. I say the blessings.

I am finished. And now, I can begin. ■

Jordana Horn is a writer and lawyer at work on her first novel.